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J  
SELECTED ARTICLES

ON THE

COMMISSION PLAN  
OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

COMPILED BY  
E. CLYDE ROBBINS

MINNEAPOLIS  
THE H. W. WILSON COMPANY

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE

There is no denying the increasing interest in the commission plan of city government. The material contained in this book has been collected and arranged especially for debaters, students, and members of clubs and organizations that are everywhere studying this new form of municipal organization.

The volume includes the best available reprints on the question. All articles have been edited and revised so as to avoid useless repetition.

It has been thought best to follow an orderly arrangement in the preparation of the book. The plan used is simple and direct. The first section, as noted in the contents, is the introduction. This deals briefly with the general municipal situation, and leads up to the commission plan. That part of the book called general discussion consists of a series of articles explaining the relationship of the commission plan to other important municipal problems. Following this, are the affirmative and negative discussions, respectively. A page of data concerning the commission plan, compiled especially for this volume, will be found of value to the student. Between the contents and the introduction will be found a brief of the question; also a bibliography, so complete as to include all important material, and so arranged as to let the investigator at once know the value of each reference. It is believed that a book arranged in this manner will be of real service to the debater and to others studying the problem. Libraries that do not contain a complete file of magazines, pamphlets, and late municipal books, will find this volume an inexpensive yet practical method of supplying the demand for material on the commission question.

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# SELECTED ARTICLES ON THE COMMISSION PLAN OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

## BRIEF\*

### INTRODUCTION

- I. Only evils arising from the form of city government which separates the legislative and executive powers will be considered.
- II. That these evils are recognized is shown by the present tendency toward the concentration of powers.
- III. This plan has generally failed where the concentration has been but partial.
  - A. New York City concentrated executive power and retained a weak council.
  - B. The city of Boston has a similar plan.
- IV. Naturally both of these cities are now considering the advisability of adopting the commission form.
- V. Numbers of other cities are moving in the same direction and many have adopted the plan.
- VI. While the isolated legislative body is needed in state and national governments, there are many peculiar conditions in the city which make it unessential.
  - A. The city is not a sovereign body.
  - B. The work is largely administrative.
  - C. The territory is small.

## COMMISSION PLAN OF

- VII. The isolated council has failed in city government since
  - A. In practice legislative and administrative work cannot be separated.
    - 1. In some cities the mayor dominates in both the administrative and legislative work.
    - 2. In others the council dominates in both.
- IX. This tendency to concentrate with a fixing of powers points to a commission form of government as the proper form.

## BRIEF PROPER—AFFIRMATIVE

- I. American cities should adopt a commission form of government because it is desirable for
  - A. It fixes responsibility in administration for
    - 1. Each commissioner is held responsible for the efficient conduct of a specific department of city administration.
  - B. It fixes responsibility in legislation for
    - 1. The legislative body is small.
    - 2. Each legislator is intelligently informed as to the city's needs.
- II. The commission form provides a most efficient legislative body in the commission council for
  - A. The legislative and administrative work of the city are properly and unalterably connected.
  - B. The councilmen have a direct and technical knowledge of city affairs.
  - C. The councilmen represent the whole city.
- III. The commission form provides a most efficient administrative body for
  - A. It secures dispatch in business.
  - B. It stimulates civic interest.
  - C. It secures economy.

## BRIEF PROPER—NEGATIVE

- I. American cities should not adopt a commission form, for it does not provide a proper correlation of departments for
  - A. Success in city government depends upon such correlation, for
    1. The cabinet form, successful in Europe and Canada, provides such a correlation.
    2. The mayor and council form have succeeded with such a correlation. ?
    3. The program of the National Municipal League demands such a correlation for a practical city government.
- II. The proper remedy for existing evils lies not in a change of form, but in a removal of causes, for
  - A. A removal of bad social and economic conditions has secured successful city government.
  - B. The introduction of bad social and economic conditions has secured a like result.
  - C. Greater local self-government has been a strong factor in securing similar results.

\*A detailed brief of both sides of the question with paragraph references will be sent to any one upon request. Address, Registrar, State University of Iowa. (Debating Bulletin, No. 206.)



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# INTRODUCTION

## *Various Forms of City Government*

At present there is no uniform system of city government in the United States. Not only do the cities of the several commonwealths have different forms, but, in many instances, municipalities within the same state operate under widely varying plans of organization. Such a situation has made the question of city government in this country both complex and difficult. Furthermore, a close study of the problem shows that while certain cities have, under a given form of organization, been successfully governed, other cities of approximately the same size, often in the same state and under the same organization, have become notorious examples of the failure of the plan. Sometimes the breakdown has been sudden, like the collapse of a great building. At other times, it has been as the gradual crumbling away of a stone wall, until the whole structure was undermined, and the machinery of government rendered ineffectual and useless.

The fact should be borne in mind in a study of municipal government that the several forms now in existence are the result of historical development. They are the outgrowth of our industrial and social conditions. Five distinct types of city government have been evolved. In addition there are many modifications of these forms.

The earliest plan was the council system. It received its name from the fact that the council exercised the important functions of government. This body consisted of a mayor, a recorder, the aldermen, and the councillors. In addition to being members of the council, the mayor, the recorder, and the aldermen performed judicial and police functions. The system was borrowed from England.

2  
Soon after the adoption of the federal constitution, however, American cities began to pattern their government after the plan of national organization. That is, city functions were divided into three classes: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. This system became known as the federal plan, due, of course, to its close analogy to the divisions of the federal government. The form soon became, and still is in general use.

By the middle of the nineteenth century certain cities instituted the board system. Under this plan important functions, such as police, fire, public health, etc., were delegated to boards or commissions. In much of their work these boards acted independently of the city council. In fact, they often exercised quasi-legislative power in addition to their administrative duties. Toward the close of the century another form—the mayor system—was established. This plan is sometimes called the one man government, because all power is vested in the hands of the mayor. He is held responsible for the conduct of municipal business.

The latest type of organization to excite wide spread interest is the commission plan. This system provides that the control of the city shall be vested in a small body of men elected at large. These men are known as commissioners. They devote all their time to city affairs. Individually they perform work of administration, while collectively they pass on all needed legislation.

Thus it is seen that among these forms are found extreme types of city organization. On the one hand is the early council system, now practically extinct, where large powers and responsibilities rest in a general legislative body. At the other extreme is the commission plan, in which the same group of men do the work of administration and legislation. The problem which is at present confronting the American people is which of the various forms, if any, is best suited to the average American municipality. There are many who maintain that no one form will prove satisfactory to all cities, because of varying political, social and economic conditions.

*Functions of City Government*

When determining the form of organization a government should have, it is necessary that there should be a careful consideration of the functions which that government has to perform. It is readily seen that the problems with which city officials have to deal are vastly different in character from those that confront officers of the state and nation.

Our federal government must solve such political and economic questions as Inter-state commerce, the tariff, foreign relations, etc.—problems, which, by their very nature, require extended legislation, administration, and adjudication. State government is concerned largely with matters of broad policy, such as regulation of liquor traffic within the commonwealth, controlling state commerce, maintaining state institutions, and passing manifold laws of a general character. In state government, as in federal, experience has proved the wisdom of retaining a form of organization in which the legislative, administrative, and judicial departments are separated one from the other.

Questions which arise in the conduct of municipal affairs, however, do not always require the checking and balancing between departments so essential in state and national governments. Some investigators go so far as to assert that such checking and balancing does not operate at all in city government. For example, it is not found in the judicial department. Municipal courts do not question the validity of acts of the city council, or of administrative officers. They confine themselves almost wholly to hearing infringements of municipal ordinances. This is due to the fact that city courts must conform their rulings to the dictum of state tribunals, while in all cases of importance affecting life, liberty, or property, the citizen has ample recourse from the city court to the state bench.

One duty of city government is administration of state laws. City officials are compelled by the state legislature to enforce all state laws within the city limits.

The great function, however, of the city is concerned with caring for its own needs. These include such enterprises as

building bridges, paving streets and constructing sewers. Well equipped and highly organized police and fire departments are maintained. Public health must be protected; the poor and sick given relief. A multiplicity of duties of this nature devolves upon the city. In addition, many matters of deliberation and policy are worked out. For instance, when the annual budget of the city of Boston is compiled, those in charge must bear in mind that the city spends annually over \$40,000,000, and has pay rolls including 12,000 individuals. Often projects are undertaken which cover long periods of time, while the number of minor legislative acts, such as ordinances, contracts, etc., soon reach into the thousands. All these things, and many more, must be performed by a modern municipality.

#### *Decay of the Council*

A matter the investigator must bear in mind before he arrives at a conclusion as to the nature of the proposition before him is the fact, undeniable and indisputable, that within the last fifty years there has been a gradual disintegration of the city council as a separate legislative organ of government. As regrettable as this may be, it has, nevertheless, actually taken place. This decay has doubtless been due to a number of causes, such as:—interference of the state legislature in city affairs, the confusing of city issues with state and national politics, the attempt on the part of council bodies to perform administrative functions, the failure of citizens to elect capable men to office, and very often, because council bodies have been so organized as to be entirely unsuited to meet the demands of a twentieth century city.

#### *The Issue*

The issue before the student of municipal government is clear. It is: Are the duties and functions of city government of such a nature as to require a form of organization in which the legislative and administrative departments are separate, or can the work be better performed by merging the legislative and administrative branches into one body? The cities of England

and of continental Europe, which are admittedly superior in government to those in America, have answered this question by jealously maintaining their separate city councils. In the United States adherents of a separate council are numbered by the thousands. The city of Newport, Rhode Island, at present conceded to be one of the best governed cities, has a separate council of about one hundred members. This body performs the legislative and deliberative functions of government. It does not administer.

On the other hand, in hundreds of American municipalities conducted according to the prevailing form—by separate legislative and administrative departments—such form of government has fallen into disrepute. It has been impossible to locate responsibility either in legislation or administration. Matters of accounting, expenditures, enforcement of laws, and granting of franchises have been conducted in a most unbusinesslike, often corrupt manner. To these cities the commission plan, which eliminates entirely the separate council, which fixes individual responsibility, which is simple in construction, quick and effective in operation, and essentially businesslike in every detail, has come as a welcome relief.

It cannot be too emphatically stated that if the student is to get a clear conception of the issues involved in the commission problem he must keep his point of view so broad that he can see in just what ways his particular issue is affected by other important movements. To assist in doing this there has been included in this book a section called general discussion. In this division the reader will find discussed the commission plan as it is related to other vital questions of the day. Its connection with the "old" form of city organization and its relation with present municipal movements are considered. Also a non-partisan consideration of the question is found here. It is advised that the articles in this section be carefully read before either the affirmative or negative material is perused.



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Problems of Good City Government, pp. 198-207.

Prof. L. S. Rowe.

1897

Our inherited ideas of democratic government have dictated a form of city organization in which the local representative assembly or city council occupies an important position. The same political traditions dictate that the higher administrative officials of the city, no matter what their functions, shall be chosen by popular election. It is a significant fact that this tenacious adherence to what we regard as the essentials of democracy has been contemporaneous with a totally different movement in other branches of administrative activity. The management of great business enterprises is being concentrated in the executive heads of industrial corporations. The responsibility for the conduct of affairs of educational and charitable institutions is likewise drifting from the board to the single executive head. Even in the management of the affairs of the church this tendency toward the concentration of executive power is apparent. Wherever the form of board management is still preserved, the actual control and responsibility are vested in one individual, whether he be called the president of the board or the chairman of the executive committee. However we may regard this tendency, there is every indication that it is not merely a passing phase, but that the immediate future will witness a strengthening of its influence.

Tendencies so clearly marked in American business and industrial activity are certain to exert an influence on the administration of public affairs. We cannot hope permanently to preserve the illusion that political organization can be kept from the influences which are dominant in every department of our national life.

If the concentration of power in the mayor represents a permanent tendency in American administrative policy, the

question immediately presents itself whether we can reconcile these changes with our views of democracy. No one will deny that the increase of executive power as well as its concentration has been accompanied by a marked increase in efficiency. The choice presented to our American communities, therefore, takes the form of an apparent opposition between democracy and efficiency. Thus presented, there is little doubt as to the ultimate choice of the American people, who, above all other people of western civilization, are worshipers of efficiency. The establishment, therefore, of a harmonious relation between democracy and efficiency, both in thought and in action, becomes a requisite for the maintenance of those institutions which we are accustomed to regard as the distinctive products of American civilization.

If this analysis of the present situation be correct, the outlook for the municipal council is anything but encouraging. While the analogy between a business and a municipal corporation may be faulty in many respects, it is of real value when viewed from the standpoint of the organization of city departments. Whether or not we agree with this analogy, we cannot disregard the fact that the popular view with reference to the administration of the city's executive departments is moving toward the standards which have proved so successful in the management of great corporate enterprises. This means that the people are prepared to accept the same administrative standards in municipal affairs as those which prevail in the business world. The recent proposal to give the police commissioner of New York a term of ten years or possibly a life tenure, would have been received with scorn and indignation fifty years ago. To-day it is regarded by many as the best means of securing an efficient administration of this service.

Similarly, the increasing limitation of the powers of the municipal council is not due to any decline in the character of its membership, but rather to a growing appreciation of the difficulty of enforcing responsibility against a large assembly. The repeated failure of the efforts to enforce such responsibility is accountable for the steady decline of popular interest in the work of the council.



It is significant that even in those cities in which years of effort have finally secured an improvement in the character of the men serving in the local legislative body, the betterment of the administrative service is in no sense commensurate with the amount of effort expended. The vital interest of the citizens lies in strengthening the administrative service rather than the legislative body. The gradual appreciation of this fact has led to the transference of what were formerly regarded as legislative functions to administrative officers. Altogether the movement is by no means uniform, the general trend of institutional development in this country is to reduce the power of the council to a control over finances, and by means of constitutional and statutory limitations to set definite limits even to this control. The council is gradually assuming the position of an organ of government to prevent the extravagant or unwise expenditure of public funds. It is thus rapidly becoming a negative factor in our municipal system. To an increasing extent the American people are looking to the executive not only for the execution, but also for the planning of municipal improvements. Even the freedom of discussion in the council is being subjected to statutory limitations by provisions requiring that the vote on financial and franchise questions shall be delayed beyond a certain period.

This decline in the power of the council involves no loss of popular control. In every city in which the mayor has been given independent powers of appointment, and has been made the real head of the administrative organization of the city, the sensitiveness of the government to public opinion has been considerably increased. Rightly viewed, this change involves possibilities of popular control which we have hardly begun to realize. Almost every city in the country offers a number of instances in which the mayor, when supported by popular opinion, has been able to withstand the combined influence of the council and any machine organization that attempted to direct his action.

The lessons of this experience have left their impress upon the political thought of the American people, and explain the

tendency to look to the executive rather than to the legislative authority for the solution of difficulties. Popular control over the city government will become more effective as public opinion becomes more thoroughly organized. At present we must depend upon a great number of voluntary organizations, representing different elements in the community, but which cannot from the nature of the case represent the opinion of the community as a whole.

The danger involved in this tendency toward concentration of executive power is that the council will be divested not only of its administrative, but of its legislative powers as well. The desire for greater administrative efficiency may lead us to a type of government in which the determination of executive policy will be left exclusively to the mayor and his heads of departments. This form of organization is certain to give us better government than does our present large and unwieldy council. The accumulated experience of American cities has shown that unless the council is reduced to a single chamber, with a small membership, responsibility cannot be enforced. The choice that presents itself is clear and simple. We must either make the council a small body of nine or eleven members, elected by the people, having complete power over the finances of the city, or we shall inevitably be driven to a system in which the council will disappear, and all power will be lodged in the mayor and his heads of departments.

The reconciliation of the idea of popular government with the concentration of executive power represents the first step toward a better adjustment of our political thinking to the conditions of city life. A second and no less important step involves some further modifications in our ideals of municipal organization. American cities are organized as if they were the small towns and villages of fifty years ago. We have proceeded on the assumption that an aggressive and progressive municipal policy can be developed out of the compromise of conflicting district interests. As a matter of fact, our present plan of district representation clogs positive action and prevents the systematic planning and economical execution of great public improvements.

Placing the mayor as a check upon the council and the

council as a check upon the mayor has served to strengthen that most baneful of political superstitions—the belief in a self-acting governmental mechanism which will carry on the work of government without the need of watchfulness and alertness on the part of the people. For every evil, no matter what its nature, we recur to the statute book. There is a widespread belief throughout the country that for every abuse there is a legislative remedy. This belief in the moralizing power of the law is one of the most insidious as well as one of the most corrupting influences in our public life. It leads us to place unenforceable laws on the statute books, and the disregard of these laws becomes the instrument of blackmail and bribery.

The same political superstition pervades the organization of our city government—to construct a self-acting mechanism which will secure honesty and guarantee efficient administration. By pitting the executive against the legislative authority, by electing one official to exercise control over another, and by making official terms as short as possible, we have beguiled ourselves with the illusion that it is possible to construct a mechanism of government which requires the attention of the citizens only at stated election periods. It is not surprising that this search for a self-acting governmental machine has proved fruitless, for it represents an attempt to relieve ourselves of a responsibility which we cannot throw off. The complexity of organization that has resulted from this attempt to secure efficiency and honesty through statutes rather than through men has done more to retard municipal progress than any other influence.

The problem presented by city government in the United States is not merely to construct a well-balanced mechanism of government, but so to construct that government that it will require the alertness and watchfulness of the people. The situation in Philadelphia is an instructive instance of the effect of so organizing the government as to leave the people under the impression that officials are so encompassed with statutory limitations that they have little power for evil. With a bicameral council, a mayor whose appointments are subject to the approval of the upper branch of the local legislative body, and such important services as the control of education vested in a board appointed by the

local judiciary, authority is split to such an extent that the people believe that no official or group of officials enjoys sufficient power to work much harm. We fail to appreciate the fact that this splitting of authority means that harmony can be secured only by gathering these loose threads in the hands of some person or group of persons, who, while not officially recognized in the organization of government, exercises the real governmental power.

The foregoing discussion has shown that industrial and social organization in the United States is tending toward an increasing concentration of executive and administrative power, and that this movement has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in efficiency. In the government of our municipalities the fear of absolutism has led us to offer considerable resistance to a plan whose value is no longer questioned in other departments of organized effort. The half-hearted recognition of this principle has led to a series of makeshifts, which have failed to give satisfactory results.

Instead of giving the mayor complete control over the administrative work of the city, we have, in most cases, hampered his powers of appointment, making them subject to the approval of the council. The unfortunate compromises which this system has compelled the mayor to make have been laid at the door of the council, and have served further to weaken faith in local representative assemblies. If this feeling continues to increase in intensity, it is likely to carry us to a form of city government in which the mayor and the heads of executive departments will exercise not only the administrative, but also the legislative functions of the municipality.

The alternative that presents itself to the American people is clear and unmistakable. If we wish to preserve the council, we must be prepared to make three changes: First, to deprive it of all participation in the appointment of executive officials; secondly, to transform it from a bicameral organization to a single chamber, and thirdly, to reduce its membership. Unless this is done, it is safe to predict that we shall gradually move toward a system in which both executive and legislative powers will be vested in the mayor and the heads of executive departments.

It is important for those who are interested in the betterment of city government to realize that while in the organization of government compromises may be attempted, the actual operation of any system is determined by deep underlying forces over which the individual has little control. The compromises that have been dictated by our unwillingness to accept the consequences of certain fundamental canons of political organization have placed our city governments at the mercy of a small group of men who understand these principles more clearly than we, and who are able to manipulate this organization for their own ends.

The traditional fear of absolutism need not deter us from making the mayor the real executive head of the city government. Correctly interpreted, this plan offers possibilities of popular control which our present system lacks. At all events, it is well for us to understand that the demand for efficiency, which the American people place above their desire for democratic rule, will inevitably lead to this concentration of executive power. The real alternative is, therefore, whether this concentration of power will be accompanied by the destruction of the city council, or whether the city council will survive as an organ of government restricted to purely legislative functions.

**Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science. 7: 155-187. April, 1889.**

**Municipal History of New Orleans. William W. Howe.**

The year 1870 witnessed an experiment in municipal government in New Orleans which deserves special mention. The charter enacted in that year by the legislature, adopted what was generally known as the administrative system. The limits of the city were considerably enlarged by including what is now known as the sixth district, and was formerly Jefferson City, and the government of the municipality thus established was vested in a Mayor and seven Administrators; namely, one of Finance, one of Commerce, one of Improvements, one of Assessments, one of Public Accounts, and one of Waterworks and Public Buildings. These officials in the first place possessed ad-

ministrative and executive functions corresponding to their names: and each of the seven was accordingly at the head of a bureau or department created for him by the statute as follows: a Department of Finance, which was the city treasury; a Department of Commerce which had general superintendence of all matters relating to markets, railroads, canals, weights and measures, the fire department and manufactories; a Department of Assessment, with general superintendence of all matters of taxation and license; a Department of Improvements charged with the construction, cleansing and repair of streets, sidewalks, wharves, bridges and drains; a Department of Police having charge of public order, houses of refuge and corrections, and the lighting of the city; a Department of Public Accounts which comprised all the duties of an Auditor and Comptroller; and, finally, a Department of Waterworks and Public Buildings, with supervision of waterworks, schoolhouses, hospitals and asylums.

But in the second place it was provided that the same Mayor and Administrators should form the Council and in a collective capacity should have extensive legislative power for local purposes. In this capacity it resembles the Spanish Cabildo. Such a Council possessed naturally many valuable qualities. Its members were elected on a general ticket and were not supposed to represent any local clique. In the exercise of their administrative duties they became familiar with the need of their respective departments and could advocate, explain or defend on the floor of the city legislature what was desired or had been done in the bureau. A small and compact body, its meetings were as businesslike as those of a bank directory. Its custom was to assemble in the Mayor's parlor generally on the day before the regular weekly meeting; and sitting in committee of the whole to discuss with the citizens who chose to attend, such subjects of public interest as might be brought up. Reporters from the daily press were present, and the journals of the next morning gave full particulars of the interchange of ideas. If the subject seemed very important and difficult, leading citizens were invited by letter or advertisement to attend and give their views. As an example of thorough discussion it may be mentioned that an ordinance in relation

to sewerage and drainage which was proposed in 1881, was debated upwards of one year, and a hearing given to every friend or opponent who desired to express his views.

No system of government can pretend to be perfect; and the charter of 1870 could not satisfy every one. It was claimed that the Council under the charter was too small, and could be too easily controlled in the interests of private or corporate gain. No preponderant evidence, however, of this assertion ever appeared. The administrators as a rule, were citizens prominent either in business or politics, and as such were far more amenable to public opinion than the ordinary councilmen of the average American city. Their methods were essentially businesslike and their legislation as a whole was characterized by public spirit and progress.

It is a matter of regret that the administrative system could not have been continued longer than it was, but after the adoption of the new state constitution in 1879 a powerful pressure for a complete change was established by local politicians. The legislature, accordingly, in June, 1882, adopted the present charter of New Orleans.

### State Administration and the Commission Plan.

E. Clyde Robbins.

A great political upheaval is taking place in city government in the middle west. The movement is not a sudden revolt of graft-burdened citizens, nor is it the result of ill-judged municipal agitation. Rather it is a response to fundamental changes that mark the beginning of a new era in the industrial and political life of cities in the Mississippi valley. At present, however, this movement is largely in the hands of ambitious reformers. If for any reason it should be misguided, the consequences may be disastrous, for its causes are powerful and permanent; but if properly directed, encouraging prospects for municipal improvement are presented.

The change from existing conditions is taking two well de-



financed courses, both of which are held with vigor and enthusiasm. One movement is toward state administrative control over cities. At present each commonwealth exercises legislative control over its municipalities. The state legislature sets forth in detail the powers and functions of city government. A municipality is forbidden to use any right or privilege that is not found in the list of powers that the legislature has especially granted. Before cities may assume a new function, the legislature must pass an act expressly authorizing it.

Conditions as they now exist are admittedly unsatisfactory. The city is the creature of the state legislature. It is subjected to all the whims and prejudices of a law-making body that is essentially partisan. This partisanship is often manifest. For instance, if a majority in the state legislature is of a given party faith, while the large cities of the state are of an opposing belief, it is not unusual for the legislature to pass measures harassing these municipalities. Often, too, there is rupture between representatives from city precincts and those from rural districts. The result is that measures pertaining to cities receive biased and improper consideration. Under legislative control the enactment of new measures, which is one of the chief functions of government, does not rest with the city but with the state legislature. As a consequence, municipalities find themselves unable to inaugurate needed reforms simply because they do not possess requisite governing power.

The plan of state administrative control is something very different from the system now in use. Strangely enough at first glance the scheme appears to take from the city the few powers that it exercises. It is nothing less than an attempt on the part of the state to supervise the actual operation of important municipal activities. The list of things that the state seeks to superintend includes the lighting, heating, water and transportation services of the city. Over companies furnishing these facilities the commonwealth would institute a strict administrative supervision.

This superintendence, however, is not exercised by the legislature itself. In place of such regulation a state commission is established, which has supervision over the public utility corpora-



tions of the various cities in the state. In many respects the body is similar in nature to boards of railway commissioners and those state commissions that everywhere look after hospitals, asylums, and penal institutions.

The other change that is taking place in municipalities of the middle west is the growing popularity of the commission plan of city government. Under such a method the work of governing the city is turned over to a single body of men. These men are called councilmen or commissioners. They are paid adequate salaries, and give their whole time to their offices. It is their sole work to govern the city upon a strictly non-partizan business basis. In some places provision is made whereby commissioners may be removed from office before their regular terms expire if, for any reason, the conduct of municipal business is disapproved by a majority of voters.

Neither state administrative control nor the commission plan originated in the middle west. Both have been tried elsewhere. It is doubtful if people in the middle west are themselves conscious that they are combining in one experiment two of the most important municipal measures of the present day. Yet this is being done. The result is bound to be interesting. It may also be extremely fruitful, for no one will deny that the two great defects in present American city government are, first, in the relations existing between the state legislature and the city government, and, second, in the actual governmental machinery of the city. These are the two deficiencies that the plan of state administrative control and the commission form of government seek to correct.

### *State Administrative Control*

If the plan of state administrative control over cities were simply to become an additional fixture in our machinery of government, it would be well worth studying. But it presents greater possibilities than that. There are certain things about it which arouse a legitimate hope that it will ultimately supersede

the present defective and unsatisfactory legislative control. If it should do this, it would stand as one of the most conspicuous measures in American municipal history.

As has been suggested, the purpose of state administrative control is to give the commonwealth supervision over public service corporations—those corporations that administer to the common needs of the people of the city. Such regulation is in complete harmony with our present municipal advancement. For years it has been recognized that some of the most malignant evils in city government are those connected with public service corporations. Gas, electric light and street railway companies and the corporations that furnish water, heat and power have each played a part in making American city government appear inefficient and corrupt.

Only in late years has there been a general recognition of this fact. The reason why the evil was not ferreted out sooner is not difficult to explain. Public service corporations were not an act of special creation. They have matured by a slow evolutionary process; they have grown just as the city has grown. Their life has been a part of the city's life. They are bone of its bone, and flesh of its flesh. If they had come into being over night, the next morning every citizen would have hailed their presence and to some extent at least, would have caught the possibilities of their power for good and evil. But so unobserved was the oncoming of these corporations that until comparatively recent times they developed almost undisturbed. From the very beginning they sank their roots deep into municipal life. They asked for and received long leases of corporate existence. Sometimes the franchises granted were perpetual. In other cases they extended over periods of from thirty to sixty and eighty years. Too often the franchises, themselves, were drawn up by the skillful lawyers of the public service corporations.

There could be but one outcome of such conditions. Before long, street car companies possessed unrestricted right to lay their rails in every street, to cross all bridges, and even to regulate their own fares. Electric light and gas companies put their poles and piping where they pleased, while water companies laid along public thoroughfares mains that the average fire engine can

drink dry. The citizens made no complaint. Very few of them realized the importance of such proceedings. The majority did not even know what was going on.

A second stage in the development of public service corporations was soon reached. With the marvelous growth of the city rival companies appeared. The shorter termed franchises began to expire, and the city councilmen were waking up to the fact that corporate franchises possess intrinsic value just the same as the best commercial paper. The period that followed was a time of spoils: councilmen sold privileges left and right, in return for the price paid, public service corporations occupied all streets, set their own standards of service and named their own rates. The amount of money which citizens lost during this era of exorbitant charges and abominable service can never be accurately estimated.

Even as great as were the financial losses, the political abuses which arose were more stupendous. Naturally, as the emoluments of municipal offices, especially council seats, grew larger, the strife for such positions became fiercer. The ward boss was soon the dominating factor in city politics. He could name the councilmen from his district.

Looking back into that period, the result seems natural. The ward boss usually had a definite understanding with corporation promoters. If for any reason the city council was not willing to grant the necessary franchises, it was not a great step to the state legislature. The growth of the party system in America made the state law-making body the next logical unit of political structure. The ward boss was quick to carry his appeals to this higher unit. Thus were municipal affairs ruthlessly mixed with state and even national politics. On the floor of the legislature there were always those willing to protect the "vested rights" of any corporation. Many were there who voted on all occasions for the party's sake. Acts hostile to individual cities were passed. Special legislation became a common method of procedure. This is not hard to understand when we recollect that it is the legislative body that sets forth the rights and privileges of the city. Thus if a certain municipality happened to be uncompromisingly opposed to public utility companies, it was not diffi-

cult for the legislature to enact a special measure applying to that particular city, and regulating terms upon which the municipality should deal with the corporations. It was the same public service evil that existed in the preceding era of the municipal growth, only it had now grown more complex.

It is from the period just described—an era of corporate and boss domination—that the American people are just emerging. Especially is this true in the middle west. Only now are citizens beginning to appreciate what it means to have public service corporations under legitimate control. As a result, reformers are searching everywhere for methods of supervision. Every kind of scheme is being suggested, but it has remained for the state administrative board to offer practical and feasible means.

The idea of controlling public utility corporations by a state administrative commission is not new. In 1898 Massachusetts created a board to supervise the street railways of the commonwealth. Other states have enacted similar measures, some passively, others aggressively. The power of the commissions has gradually been extended. Wisconsin reached a maximum point of expansion in 1907, when it created a board that has regulation of all municipal lighting, heating, power, transportation, and telephone companies. Not only in the middle west, but all over the country these commissions are being created.

In organization the board is simple. It is composed of a small body of men selected with reference to fitness rather than political preferment. Salaries are made commensurate with the quality of work demanded. An investigation of the personnel of commissions that have already been created shows that when care is exercised in appointments, men who have real ability and who possess a broad knowledge of city affairs can be secured.

Although the commission is simple in structure, its powers and responsibilities are large. It strikes right at the heart of the public utility problem. The commission asserts its authority to fix the valuation of the physical property of every municipal lighting, heating, power, transportation, and telephone company. Methods of corporation accounting are prescribed by this board, and to it the various corporations must make stipulated financial reports. It can adjust and fix the rates that companies may

charge. It can establish and enforce a stringent standard of service. The authority of the commission is subject only to review by the courts.

It is seen at a glance what a great factor for good or evil such a commission is. The result can scarcely be over-estimated. If persons susceptible to corporate influence should be placed upon the board, the injury would be enormous. If it is dominated by men who have the real welfare of the city at heart, its power for good is equally great.

There are definite reasons for believing that these state boards will be honest and efficient. Among the influences which will work to keep the commissioners obedient to popular will is the power of publicity. Under a state commission all dealings with corporations are between the companies and the commission direct. Hence, if a politician wishes to ply his trade in the interest of the public service corporation, he will have to do so in the open. He will have to deal with a select body which is itself always in the lime-light. Hitherto, the politician has dealt with a questionable city council, or an indefinite, intangible state legislature. Under state administrative control all this is changed. There are no partizan promises to be remembered, no party pledges to be kept. It is true the power of money is still available to the corporation, but the very fact that the commissioners are continually subject to public scrutiny, as well as to surveillance of city councils, will make any member hesitate a long time before accepting corporation money.

It would seem that under the proposed plan the scheme of secret rate making is doomed. The matter is put on a business basis with adequate publicity. Corporations are compelled to adopt genuine business methods. Their books are opened to a reasonable inspection by proper public officials. Their rates, their service, their very corporate existence are dependent upon the legitimacy with which they conduct their affairs. Secret rate making under such circumstances is nearly impossible.

Theoretically, a state administrative board is sound. Experience has already shown its actual operation to be beneficial. Yet there is in the middle west a lively opposition to it. This

antagonism comes from an unexpected quarter, that is, from the cities themselves.

The reason why cities are opposing a state commission is not difficult to explain. The continual struggle for more local self-government, and the battle against special legislation from which the city is just emerging, have made municipal authorities suspicious of any measure which the state legislature desires to enact. To many the creation of a state administrative board appears but a further development by the legislature of a well defined system of political patronage. It will furnish a few more offices for ward bosses and meddling politicians, and that is all. But what seems to opponents of the idea infinitely worse than political jobbery is that the scheme would deprive the city of what little self-government it already possesses. The municipality would be bound hand and foot to the state legislature.

With all due regard for the sincerity with which cities are resisting the supposed encroachment of the state administrative commission, it must be admitted that their view is short sighted. They are not considering the sentiment of the whole state as it actually exists. State commissions are not being established to furnish political offices, or to deprive the city of its powers, but because there is a state-wide belief that municipal conditions must be improved. Bitter experience has led the public to be skeptical and cynical in regard to municipal service. There is but one course for cities to pursue. Instead of asking for increased powers of government, municipalities should first remove the general impression of mismanagement and graft. The state commission offers a way to do this, and if it is accomplished, the public will be far more likely to listen to the request for additional self-government. People wish to be assured that city affairs are managed honestly; that the citizens, and not public service companies, are reaping the benefits of its laws. When convinced that cities are ably conducted, voters will not long withhold from municipalities the additional powers that they are to-day seeking. It is popular sentiment which regards the city as inefficient and corrupt that is tying the municipality hand and foot, and not the state legislature.

The city should awake to this situation. It should not strike blindly at such measures as a state administrative commission simply because on the surface there are indications that such a body might usurp municipal powers. The state board offers a sensible solution for present difficulties. It promises to put the public service corporation on a sound business footing. This would be a decided step forward. The problem of city government would be immeasurably simplified, and new ways would be opened for municipal improvement.

### *City Commission*

The second innovation in the middle west is the commission plan of city government. This plan, which was first put into operation at Galveston, Texas, after the storm of 1900, is spreading with remarkable rapidity. No other form in American municipal development has grown so rapidly. Although it is being adopted by both Pacific and Atlantic cities, it is in the Mississippi valley that the new form is meeting with most favor and is being tried in the greatest variety of ways.

The underlying principles of the new idea are easy to understand. Provision is made for the election of a comparatively small body of men, called commissioners. Up to the present time the number has not exceeded five, although proposed plans which some of the larger cities are considering provide for more governing officials. The main object, however, is that the number of commissioners shall be so small that citizens can center individual responsibility both in case of meritorious work and of incompetency.

Candidates for the office of commissioner are nominated at a non-partizan primary by direct ballot. There are no preceding caucuses, and no party lines of any kind. There is no election from wards. In place of these is the primary vote. Any citizen who files a petition with a stipulated number of signatures—usually a small number—may have his name printed on the primary ballot. The results of this vote are tabulated, and candidates to be voted upon at the regular election chosen. Thus if five commissioners are to be selected, the ten names receiving the



highest number of votes at the primary are placed upon the regular election ballot.

One of the five commissioners is called the mayor. Sometimes he is elected separately from the other commissioners, although at the same time and in the same manner. It is the business of the mayor to preside over meetings of the commission in much the same way as do executives of our city councils. He may or may not have veto power.

There are fundamental differences, however, between the commission form and the ordinary mayor and council system. The commissioners devote their entire time to governing the city. They make it their business. They meet in daily sessions. They receive annual salaries ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000 in cities where the mayor and councilmen formerly received but one or two hundred dollars. Another differentiating feature is in administration. If there are five commissioners, the work of administration is divided into five departments. These departments are arranged to suit the particular needs of individual cities, but generally include such divisions as a Department of Public Safety, which embraces the police and fire organizations, a Department of Finance, a Department of Streets and Alleys, a Department of Public Health, and a Department of Parks and Public Improvements. If the city is a seaport, there is usually a Department of Docks and Wharfs. At the head of each department one of the commissioners is placed. He has full charge of the department and is held personally accountable for the conduct of it. Such a method secures individual responsibility. If there is anything wrong in a given department, citizens can go to the commissioner in charge and ascertain the cause. On the other hand, if a department is managed with efficiency and integrity, citizens likewise know upon whom to bestow credit. Even though one of his subordinates be at fault, the commissioner cannot shift responsibility; it is his business to see that those under him perform their services honestly and intelligently.

Such, in brief, is the plan of the administration. In some municipalities the central features have already been supplemented by additional measures. For instance, uniform accounting in the various departments is generally insisted upon. In other



cities, commissioners must publish a monthly detailed statement of the condition of each department and of the city as a whole. These statements are issued in pamphlet form and are given to any citizen free of charge.

Another radical difference between the mayor and council system and the commission form is in legislation. Up to a comparatively recent time, it was accepted as axiomatic even in city government, that those who do the administering should not do the legislating. In fact, the line of cleavage has always been between the legislative and administrative departments. The commission form upsets this idea. It turns matters of administration and legislation over to one body of men—the commissioners. Every day these officers meet in joint session. Affairs of the city are discussed, and all needed legislation is passed by them. It is at these meetings that we see a great contrast between the new idea and the old council system. Instead of having business reported by committees and sub-committees, it is considered directly by the commissioners themselves. Each officer is in constant touch with his own department. He knows just what legislation is needed for it. Hence there is no occasion to resort to a clumsy and inefficient committee in order to obtain information upon any given point.

For a city, such a manner of conducting legislation has great advantages. It is direct. There are no confusing committees and boards to scatter responsibility. It is also rapid. Five men, each of whom thoroughly understands his work, can pass more intelligent legislation in one short sitting than an uninformed and hesitating council will get through in a week's time.

The commission secures responsibility and efficiency. It is also economic. Responsibility is procured by centering individual obligation upon each commissioner as the head of a department. Efficiency follows as a consequence. In Des Moines, after the adoption of the plan, a number of influential citizens went to Commissioner Hamery, in charge of the Department of Public Safety. They told him he was responsible for the abominable conditions existing in the red light district, and that he would be held personally accountable for future conditions. The result was that the whole objectionable section was abolished.

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Responsibility had been obtained. As soon as it was secured, efficiency was not long delayed.

It might seem upon first glance that paying large salaries to these commissioners would add to the already enormous debt of the average city. But this has not been the case. Through greater simplicity in organization, and the adoption of business methods, commissioners have, in almost every case, been able to save annually for the city amounts far in excess of their own salaries. In addition they have secured better service than formerly.

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This movement in the middle west is concerned with nothing less than the underlying features of the two great problems of city government: the relation of the city to the state; and the relation of the city to its individual citizens. If through the state administrative commission, the citizens who are back of this agitation can establish a reasonable relationship between the state and the city, and if by means of the city commission they can secure to the individual citizen a responsible and efficient government, they will indeed have done much toward solving one of the greatest economic and political problems that confront the American people today.

**National Municipal League, Proceedings of the Providence Conference for Good City Government, 1907. pp. 142-55.**  
Galveston Plan of City Government. William Bennett Munro.

Galveston, as is well known, was the first American city to give the system of "government by commission" a trial. . . . The old municipal framework was abolished root and branch, and by a new charter, granted in 1901, the administration of the city was entrusted to five commissioners, three of whom were to be appointed by the governor and two elected by the citizens of Galveston. Before long, however, the constitutionality of the charter was called into question, and the Supreme Court of Texas decided that certain functions which the commissioners

had been authorized to assume could not be exercised except by elective officers. In March, 1903, therefore, the legislature was appealed to for an amendment to the charter making all the commissioners elective, and the five original commissioners were forthwith endorsed by the voters at the polls.

The Galveston charter, amended in 1903, provides for the popular election, every two years, of five commissioners, one of whom is given the title of mayor-president. All are elected at large. The mayor-president is presiding officer of the commission but otherwise has no special powers. By a majority vote of the five commissioners all municipal ordinances are passed, and all appropriations are voted, the mayor-president having no right to veto either absolute or qualified. The commissioners likewise, by majority vote, apportion among themselves the headships of the four main departments of civic administration, namely, finance and revenue, waterworks and sewerage, police and fire protection, and streets and public property; the mayor-president having no special department but exercising a general coordinating influence over all. A single commissioner is, therefore, immediately responsible for the administration of each department. The commission as a whole draws up and passes the annual budget, awards all contracts, and makes all important appointments. Minor appointments are made by the individual commissioners each in his own special department. There is throughout a complete centralization of all powers, legislative and administrative, and a very definite location of all responsibility.

No one who has made any impartial attempt to follow the work of the Galveston commission during the last six years will venture to gainsay its very striking success. The financial condition of the city has been most decidedly improved; all the municipal services have been brought to a much higher point of efficiency; a better grade of citizens has been willing to seek and accept civic office; and the general tone of municipal administration has been very noticeably raised. The commissioners present, in their reports, such a convincing array of facts that it would be idle to question the success of the new régime. The success has been attributable in general to three or four canons

of policy, from which the commissioners have not swerved during the last five years, and which may be summed up as (1) the use of approved business methods in civic financing; (2) the entire elimination of all leakages in expenditures; (3) the making of all appointments on the basis of individual efficiency; and (4) the strict accountability of each commissioner for the on-goings of his own department. All the improvements of the last half decade in the Texas city can be attributed, substantially, to the fact that the new system of government has rendered strict adherence to these fundamental rules of sound municipal administration possible and even imperative.

It is not necessary to speak in any detail of specific advantages made in municipal administration by Galveston under the system of government by commission. It is enough that these were readily noted by neighboring Texan cities, and that the latter soon bestirred themselves to the task of inaugurating a similar framework of administration. Since 1903, charters fundamentally similar to that of Galveston have been sought and obtained by five other cities of Texas: Houston, Fort Worth, Austin, Dallas, and El Paso. The experience, moreover, was not lost upon many cities in the North, and during the last two or three years, measures have been introduced into the legislatures of at least a dozen states all aiming to permit cities to simplify their framework of administration more or less generally in accord with the Texan plan. At its last session the Legislature of Iowa put such a measure upon the statute books, rendering optional to all cities of over 25,000 population the adoption of the commission system. This privilege has already found acceptance in the capital city of Des Moines; in this case provision being made for the employment of certain advanced methods of securing the strict and consistent responsibility of the authorities to their constituents.

Despite a general impression that the commission system of local administration is a novelty in American government, the principle involved is by no means new in the United States. It is in almost no important respect different from the New England system of town government by a board of selectmen, who, with their chairman, assume and concentrate in themselves all

administrative and legislative functions from one annual election until the next. There are many New England "towns" with populations quite large enough to entitle them to rank as cities, which have, for more than a century, maintained what is to all intents and purposes a system of government by commission. Their selectmen, who are chosen by the people at large, represent in their jurisdiction a complete fusion of local power and responsibility. In every state of the Union, moreover (with the exception of Louisiana and Rhode Island), county administration has been vested almost wholly in the hands of an elective commission. The use of the term "commission" has misled many into overlooking a system with which they have been long familiar under a different designation. American cities have had occasion, no doubt, to become familiar with "commissions" but with commissions of a very different sort.

No aspect of the general problem of municipal reform has received more attention by the press and on the platform during the last year than the merits and defects of the commission plan. In the main, however, these discussions have dwelt largely upon the advantages of the system, many of which are almost too obvious to require emphasis. The defects, on the other hand, do not appear on the surface so plainly, though a closer examination will disclose that the system of government by commission, if generally applied to American cities under present conditions, would in all probability encounter important objections which no real friend of permanent municipal reform ought to treat lightly. Some of these relative merits and defects may be briefly noticed, so far as it may be accounted safe to generalize in the light of American municipal experience.

The cardinal advantage of the system is that it affords definite hope of putting an end to the intolerable decentralization of responsibility which now characterizes American civic administration. By concentrating powers and focusing public attention upon a narrow area it will render more effective the scrutiny which the voters may apply to the conduct of men in public office. If the system does not guarantee efficient administration, it at least promises to disclose where the blame for inefficiency should be made to fall. It will undoubtedly facilitate

the election of a higher type of men, for American municipal experience has plainly demonstrated that small bodies with large powers attract a better class of citizens than large bodies with restricted jurisdiction. The reduction in numbers of the school boards of St. Louis, Boston, and other large cities has served to show the truth of this aphorism in conclusive fashion. Even though party organizations may continue to dictate the nomination of commissioners, as they now do that of councilmen, these organizations will no longer be placed under pressure to give representation to every sectional, racial, and religious interest at the cost of placing inferior men in candidacy. That government by commission will eliminate partisan candidatures is something scarcely to be hoped for; but there is good reason to believe that it would remove from party organizations much of the sinister pressure with which these have now to contend.

Again, it is well known that municipal corruption nowadays arises as frequently from the power of municipal authorities to thwart the meritorious plans of public-service corporations as from their power to forward reprehensible projects. If the present system of checks and balances puts a restriction upon the ill-considered granting away of privileges, it none the less puts a premium upon the withholding of rights which should, in all public interest, be granted without hesitation. It is extremely doubtful whether the chances of obtaining a municipal franchise at the present time in any large city are properly proportioned to the merits of an application therefor. A small commission would, indeed, simplify the task of dealing with civic franchises on a business basis, and, if there be any fear that the unchecked power of granting municipal franchises is a jurisdiction too momentous to be vested in the hands of a small body, provision may be made, as in the Des Moines charter, for having the acts of the commission in this sphere subject to ratification by the voters.

Still again, as we are frequently reminded, the work of administering the affairs of a city is in every essential respect akin to that of conducting the affairs of a private business corporation. Now the salient characteristics of sound corporate management is the centralization of powers in the hands of a small board of



directors. What, we are asked, would be thought of a business corporation which intrusted the management of its interests to a bicameral board, made up of classes of members selected in different ways, representing different interests, possessing separate jurisdictions, and designed to embody a system of checks and balances? Why should the affairs of a municipality demand an administrative machinery so much more complex than that of the largest private corporation? There is danger, however, of pressing this point too far, for it must be remembered that the analogy between the work of the municipal and that of the private corporation is by no means perfect. The city, for example, enjoys many legal privileges and immunities which an ordinary business corporation does not possess. It is not legally responsible for the torts of its police officers, of the employés of its fire department, or for those of several other classes of its agents; whereas the private corporation is directly liable to be heavily mulcted for the negligence or inefficiency of those whom it takes into its service. Furthermore, in determining matters of policy the authorities of a municipality must give weight to many considerations of social well-being which the management of a private corporation may afford to neglect. It must be admitted, too, that administration by a board of directors is not necessarily synonymous with integrity and efficiency. One need not go far afield to find instances in which directors have been deficient in their knowledge of affairs immediately in their care, or in which they have personally profited at the expense of those interests which they were chosen to guard. Nevertheless, it may be said with truth that there is plenty of room for the infusion of "business principles" into civic administration, and the analogy, if not pushed too far, has much force.

The system of government by commission will serve to render municipal administration more prompt and more effective in action. In a multitude of counsellors there may be wisdom, but there is also, almost inevitably, friction, delay, and intrigue. A system of division of powers is almost certain to counterbalance what it gains in security against hasty and arbitrary action what it loses in inability to cope with problems which

demand prompt, united and uncompromising attention. In local administration promptness and efficiency are imperative; and it may be properly urged that, in order to secure these essential qualities, a municipality is justified in weakening its organs of deliberation and in assuming a reasonable amount of risk that concentrated power will be abused.

There are, no doubt, many incidental advantages which cities may reasonably hope to secure from the introduction of the commission system, and to these the experience of Galveston bears abundant testimony. Most of these, however, are relative to the existing conditions in particular cities, and may not, therefore, be dealt with in general terms.

To the casual student the defects of the commission system are, perhaps, not so apparent as the merits. They exist, nevertheless, and are of sufficient importance to demand careful and judicious consideration; for the cause of municipal reform may receive permanent injury through the open advocacy by its friends of any plan of administration which has not been adequately studied in the light of conditions which now exist or are likely to exist in American cities.

➤The most common objections urged in the public press and by the rank and file of municipal politicians is that the plan is un-American and undemocratic; that it involves a radical departure from American traditions of local self-government and proposes a step in the direction of municipal dictatorships. This objection is as easy to raise as it is difficult to support. The present framework of municipal administration, with its division of powers, is not a whit more traditionally "American" than is the New England town system of government by a board of selectmen with no division of powers whatever. That the system of administration by a small body of men tends to remove control "away from the people" is an assertion which the whole history of local government in the United States absolutely refutes. Indeed, it has been proven time and again that a single elective officer may, in his official actions, more faithfully reflect public opinion than a large body of elected representatives. Much of the latent and unreasoning prejudice against the new plan springs, no doubt, from the popular association of the "com-



mission" with the idea of state interference in municipal matters.

(The observant De Tocqueville once remarked that local government is to national what the elementary school is to the university; that each in its respective sphere performs the work of preparation. Political education, it has been observed, consists in the exercise not only of the right to choose but of the right to be chosen—in candidacy and in service—and under the present municipal régime such education is annually afforded to a large number of citizens. The plan of government by commission proposes greatly to reduce this number. It would cut down the list of elective officers to four or five, all other posts being filled by appointment presumably for long terms. This policy, it is objected, would tend to vest the work of civic administration permanently in the hands of a very few men, and might very well assist in the development, as in the German cities, of a professional city bureaucracy. (The present multiplication of elective officers affords, to a unique degree, the opportunity for a large number of citizens to be brought into touch with local political affairs and to obtain such political education as this contact involves.)

Again, objection is made that the system will serve to strengthen rather than to weaken the influence of the regular partisan organizations in civic affairs. The concentration of power and patronage in the hands of a few commissioners would, it is claimed, make it seem imperative to the party leaders that the commission should be controlled; and the party energies, now spread over a wider area, would thus be concentrated at a single point. It is quite true whenever the power and the patronage of the mayor have been extended the result has not been to diminish the force of partisanship in mayoralty elections; on the contrary, party leaders have been impelled to make more energetic campaigns and to perfect their organizations in order that they might control an office which had become the more valuable to them. Furthermore, the election of four or five commissioners by the voters at large would, in all probability, result in selections from the ranks of a single party; the dominant party could in most cases elect its whole slate, and the minority party would in consequence be wholly unrepresented. There might, no doubt,

be frequent exceptions to this, but it would be the more usual outcome. On the other hand, a large council, the members of which are elected by small districts, will almost certainly contain representatives of the weaker political party. Much of the hopes placed upon the new system arise from the proposal that commissioners shall be elected at large; but it must not be forgotten that the plan of election at large is not without its counterbalancing defects.

It has, perhaps, been characteristic of the American voter that he is prone to lay too much stress upon the form of government and too little upon its personnel. He is not always quick to see that the more efficient administration of European cities results not at all from their superior framework of local government, but from the higher calibre of men who seek and obtain municipal office. Without a change of personnel, the substitution of government by commission for the existing system would assuredly avail but little. Indeed, a corrupt or an inefficient commission with wide powers would be much more capable of injuring the best interests of a city than an equally corrupt or inefficient set of administrative organs with powers and patronage decentralized; for the very complexity and cumbrousness of the present system serves in some degree to place an obstacle in the way of any widespread or consistent wrong-doing. The real question is, therefore, whether a better class of men would be attracted to a small commission than a large council. To this the lesson of experience seems to give an affirmative reply. But it is a matter of probability rather than a matter of certainty.

Sponsors of the commission plan have sometimes urged that its adoption would ensure administration by skilled experts, since appointments made by a small body would probably be dictated by reason of merit and experience alone. It may be noted, however, that the vesting of the right of appointment in the hands of a small body, or even in the hands of a single officer, would not necessarily ensure this result. There was a time in American cities when patronage was committed to the municipal council, and under this system partisan considerations almost exclusively influenced the making of appointments to office. Municipal re-

formers insisted that this pernicious policy could be brought to an end only by transferring the appointing power to the mayor and by placing upon the mayor alone the full and entire responsibility. But during the decade or more since this transfer has been made it may well be doubted whether individual merit and capabilities have counted much more in determining appointments than they did in the days when the council possessed the patronage. Now it is proposed to vest the patronage once again with a body of men; but one may scarcely venture to hope that partisan considerations will lose much of their strength because of any such further transfer. Definite location of responsibility for civic appointments seems, as experience shows, to afford some assurance against gross inefficiency; it does not, apparently, afford a guarantee that the degree of efficiency will be very high.

An important feature of both the Galveston and Des Moines plans of city government by commission is that the "appropriating" and "spending" authorities are fused. In other branches of American government it has been the policy to keep these two jurisdictions distinct and independent; and this has been true alike of national, state and local administration. The legislative organs appropriate the funds, the administrative organs supervise their expenditure. In the New England system of town government the board of selectmen does not appropriate moneys for any purpose; this function is reserved to the annual "town meeting." The concentration of both powers in the hands of a single small commission might, and probably would, serve the interests of integrity so long as men of the right caliber constituted the commission; but there are those who see in this fusion of jurisdictions a potential element of danger. It involves, at any rate, a radical departure from a principle which has hitherto characterized not alone American government, but the governmental systems of the leading European states as well. In the successful administration of German cities, for example, this separation of the appropriating from the spending departments has always been strongly emphasized.

It is sometimes urged that the general adoption of the system of government by commission would encourage state interven-

tion in municipal affairs. In every large city there come up, year by year, many important questions which demand broad legislative action. Now, whether their policy has been wise or unwise in this direction, it is an undoubted fact that state authorities have been extremely loath to entrust broad legislative functions to small boards whose jurisdiction is mainly administrative. The association of well-considered legislative action with large bodies is deeply imbedded in the American mind and will not be easily eradicated. If large municipal councils are eliminated from the framework of city government there would seem to be a danger that state legislatures would be tempted to assume for themselves some of the broader legislative functions which the councils have been accustomed to exercise. At any rate, we know from experience that where the legislative powers of municipal councils have been curtailed their former powers have usually been assumed by the state legislature and have not been transferred to some other organ of local government. That there has been, on the whole, too much state interference in municipal affairs most students of government are disposed to admit; this intervention has been on occasions salutary, but more often detrimental to the best interests of the cities concerned. It may properly be urged, therefore, that any step which promises to afford an incentive to greater inroads upon the principle of civic autonomy should not be taken hastily or without due consideration of its less immediate but none the less important consequences.

In weighing the respective merits and defects of the Galveston plan as these would probably work out were the system given general application, the burden of proof ought in fairness to be placed upon those who advocate the extension. A change in any department of American government which involves a transformation so complete, of the whole framework of organization should not be readily adopted, until it can be said to promise, with a reasonable degree of certainty, a very decisive improvement in civic administration. It must not be forgotten that the experiment of government by commission has as yet been adequately tried in Galveston alone, and that here the circumstances were distinctly unusual. A receivership may be the best means

of getting a bankrupt business corporation upon its financial feet, but it does not follow that all sound and solvent concerns should forthwith permanently adopt this method of administering their affairs.

On the other hand, as the present system of civic administration is too complicated, and too *cursed* with the *curse* of divided responsibility to prove reasonably efficient, any step in the direction of simplification should be welcomed by those who have the best interests of American cities at heart. Those who are prone to look askance at anything which involves concentration of power may be reminded that such is never dangerous when accompanied by an equal concentration of responsibility. Now a few American cities at the present time are, as every one knows, controlled by small coteries of men—party managers—who dominate the official organs. These men are dangerous because they concentrate power without responsibility. The system of government by commission, if it would not eliminate the “bosses,” promises at any rate to compel them to work in the open.

Experiments with the Galveston plan in a number of cities differing in size and situated in different parts of the country, will serve to mark out more clearly the merits and defects of the system in action. Such experiment may be welcomed as paving the way for what may secure substantial improvement in civic administration; but no one who appreciates the difficulties of the problem will readily hope to find in this or in any other formal change a panacea for all municipal ills. The plan can be said to have established a *prima facie* case; and it well deserves a sympathetic trial on a sufficiently broad scale to enable it to be fairly judged.

American Political Science Association, Proceedings, 1907.  
4: 189-92.

Des Moines Plan of City Government. Benjamin F. Shambaugh.

I shall not in this paper attempt to exploit the Des Moines plan of city government as a method of municipal reform or as a solution of the problems of city administration. My purpose

will be simply to point out such of the newer institutional forms of democracy as are expressed in "An act to provide for the government of certain cities," recently passed by the general assembly of Iowa and applicable to all cities of the first-class in that state, having a population of 25,000 or over.

Having been originally brought forward and urged by the people of the city of Des Moines, the system of government outlined in the act of the general assembly has come to be known generally as "The Des Moines Plan of City Government." It has already been adopted by two of the leading cities of the state, namely: Des Moines and Cedar Rapids—but organization under the new system has not yet been effected in either place.

The Des Moines plan is of course not an altogether unique system of municipal government. It is simply a new edition of the more familiar commission plan; or, it is the Galveston plan revised. Briefly, it provides for the government of the city by a council consisting of a mayor and four councilmen who are vested with all executive, legislative, and judicial powers and duties now had, possessed and exercised by the mayor, city council, board of public works, park commissioners, board of police and fire commissioners, board of waterworks trustees, board of library trustees, solicitor, assessor, treasurer, auditor, city engineer, and other executive and administrative officers in cities of the first-class.

Furthermore, the executive and administrative powers and duties are distributed among five departments designated respectively as: department of public affairs; department of accounts and finances; department of public safety; department of streets and public improvements; and department of parks and public property. And, moreover, each member of the council is required to serve as superintendent of a department.

The members of the council are chosen by the electorate of the city. But all other officers and assistants (including a city clerk, a solicitor, an assessor, a treasurer, an auditor, a civil engineer, a city physician, a marshal, a chief of fire department, a market master, a street commissioner, and three library trustees) are elected or appointed by the council and subject to removal at any time by the same authority. It is also provided that the



council shall appoint three civil service commissioners who under the direction of the council are required to perform the usual duties prescribed for such civil service commissioners.

Turning now to the newer institutional forms of democracy as expressed in the act of the general assembly of Iowa the following deserve mention:

1. Upon the petition of twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate the Des Moines plan of government is submitted in cities of the first-class to a direct vote of the people for adoption or rejection. And similarly upon petition a vote may be secured upon the abandonment of the plan at any time after it has been in operation for six years.

2. The mayor and four councilmen are nominated by a general non-partisan primary election, that is, they are nominated by the electorate at large at a primary election in which ballots are used containing no party marks whatever. And these same officers are elected biennially at large, that is, on a general ticket.

3. The members of the council may be removed or recalled at any time by the electorate. For it is provided that upon the petition of twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate the question of the removal of the incumbent of any elective office is submitted to a direct vote of the people.

4. Proposed ordinances may be submitted to the council through petition from the electorate; and such proposed ordinances, if not passed by the council, are submitted without alteration to a direct vote of the people. Furthermore, ordinances proposed by petition or which have been adopted by a vote of the people may not be repealed or amended except by a vote of the people.

5. No ordinance passed by the council (except in certain cases particularly mentioned) "shall go into effect before ten days from the time of its final passage"; and if during said ten days a petition signed by at least twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate is presented to the council protesting against the passage of such ordinance the same shall be suspended from going into operation and it shall be the duty of the council to reconsider such ordinance, and if the same is not entirely repealed it shall be submitted by the council to the direct vote of the people.

6. "Every ordinance or resolution appropriating money or ordering any street improvement or sewer, or making or authorizing the making of any contract, or granting of any franchise or right to occupy or use the streets, highways, bridges or public places in the city for any purpose, shall be complete in the form in which it is finally passed, and remain on file with the city clerk for public inspection at least one week before the final passage or adoption." Moreover, "every franchise or grant for interurban or street railways, gas or water-works, electric light or power plants, heating plants, telegraph or telephone systems or other public service utilities within (the) city, must be authorized or approved" by a direct vote of the people.

7. All meetings of the council at which any person not a city officer is admitted shall be open to the public.

8. The council is required each month to print in pamphlet form for distribution a detailed itemized statement of all receipts and expenditures of the city along with a summary of its proceedings during the preceding month. And at the end of each year the council shall provide for a complete examination of all books and accounts of the city by competent accountants and shall publish the results of all such examinations.

Thus it is seen (to summarize) that in the Des Moines plan of city government the democratic idea of government in accord with the will of the people has been institutionalized by first centralizing all powers and authority in a council of five men and then making that council directly responsible and accountable to the electorate for the faithful performance of their duties in accordance with the desires of the people through these newer institutional forms of democracy, namely:

- 1. The non-partisan primary.
- 2. The election of officers at large, i. e., on a general ticket.
- 3. The recall.
- 4. The initiative.
- 5. The referendum.
- 6. The veto or protest.
- 7. The publicity of all business.
- 8. The expert examination of all books and accounts.



## AFFIRMATIVE DISCUSSION

**Commission Government: A General Statement.**  
**James A. Berryhill.**

Prepared for the The Commercial Club of Des Moines, Iowa.

First. The plan involves the concentration of full responsibilities upon a limited council, five in number, elected at large, and thereby responsible to the entire electorate of the city. By limiting the size of the council we secure the same effective management so notable in the administration of great business corporations. Under the old system of divided powers and distributed responsibility, the public official did not feel that degree of personal responsibility necessary to effective action, and was prone to throw the burden, especially of disagreeable duties, upon his associate, who in turn evaded the responsibility. If concentrated management of the kind in question can succeed in the administration of such great corporations as the United States Steel, the New York Central, Union Pacific and other railway companies, and such great banks as the City National of New York, with deposits aggregating nearly two hundred and fifty million dollars, and of other great institutions of similar character, I cannot see why it cannot bring success in the administration of the business of a municipality. The chief function of our city is the business one involving ordinary business problems like those assumed by private corporations, and that phase of government should be paramount in the development of the organization.

Second. Recognizing the fact that the council of the city must act in a representative capacity and in order to enforce general supervisory attention of the affairs of the entire city, we provide for the election of the councilmen-at-large. Under

the old ward system the representative of the ward does not recognize his responsibility to the city at large, and is driven inevitably into combinations with the representatives of other wards, whereby the interests of his ward or of the combination, which frequently represents a bare majority of the council, are cared for, to the detriment of the interests of the city at large. Under the ward system the voters are given but a fractional influence in the affairs of the city. Such a system inevitably involves the evasion of duty by public representatives.

Third. We recognize the fact that the power to grant franchises to public service corporations is likely to involve the corruption of public officials and to avoid that possibility we provide that all franchises shall not take effect until they are approved by a majority vote of the electors of the city in question. The submission of the franchise proposition to the electors is made mandatory. You can readily see that under this provision it would be futile for the franchise corporation to purchase the public officials.

Fourth. That the community may be advised of all public legislation affecting its interests, we provide for publicity by prescribing that ordinances shall be perfected in complete form and remain upon the table subject to inspection for a week before final passage. This would give the citizens an opportunity to protest against objectionable ordinances during the week prior to their passage. To render assurance doubly sure, we provide that ordinances, except those of an emergency character, shall, after passage, remain in the clerk's office, subject to public inspection for a period of ten days, before taking effect, and during that interim we grant to the electors the right, upon petition of twenty-five per cent of their number, to demand a referendum upon the ordinances in question, or a submission to a popular vote.

Fifth. Again recognizing the fact that the electors own the city and that the council is simply representative, we provide for the initiative. In the event that the council proves refractory and refuses to consider legislation of important public moment, we give to the electors the right to demand the submission of public questions to a popular vote and make it man-

datory upon the council to submit such propositions to such vote upon such demand.

Sixth. In the event that councilmen prove traitors to the public interest and betray their constituents, we grant to the electors the right to recall an objectionable councilman and to fill his place with a successor more responsive to the public interest.

Seventh. In order to avoid political machines, and rabid partisan rule, we provide for a non-partisan nomination to be followed by a non-partisan election of councilmen.

Under the administration of this law the past nine months we have secured extremely satisfactory government. The general consensus of opinion of our citizens is that the system has in every way been successful, and I believe that should the matter be re-submitted to the voters fully 90 per cent would approve of the plan and advocate its ratification. We believe that our individual councilmen have been more alert in the performance of their duties, more considerate of the public interest and more effective in their work than any council we have ever had in this city. Our government is extremely efficient and economical and we believe we are getting far better returns than ever before. We do not rely on the voluntary work of the council, but compensate them liberally for their services.

You will observe from the outline herein given that we have in effect reintroduced the New England town meeting system of government adapting it to large communities. We recognize the fact that large town meetings of all the electors could not be conducted upon a deliberative basis, and the ballot must of necessity be made use of to secure an expression of the popular will. The election is a substitute for the town meeting and the initiative and referendum give to the citizens all of the privileges reserved by the electors of the New England town. Our system recognizes the fact that the United States is democratic in its principles. By democratic I mean democratic in the broad sense, in the fact that we recognize the people as the source of power, and regard the public official as their representative pledged to carry out their will.

The Galveston plan of government does not contain the checks and balances incorporated in the Des Moines plan, and is not as democratic in character. I believe that the changes made in the Galveston charter by the Des Moines plan law infinitely improves the system and practically prevents the abuses incident to a bureaucratic system.

**Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette. March 25, 1909.**

Commends Commission Plan. E. R. Sherman.

The commission plan was adopted in Cedar Rapids at a special election held in December, 1907, and went into effect April 6, 1908. Little interest was taken in this election. Only a minority of the voters took the trouble to go to the polls and the proposition was carried by but 33 votes. If it were to come up in Cedar Rapids tomorrow on the question of going back to the old plan, I believe that there would be a vote of 85 per cent in favor of the retention of the commission law. The people are interested in it—they see that things are being done, that there is a responsible head to city affairs; that their money is being expended with a view to economy and results; that they are being constantly informed as to the progress of the city's business—in short, that their municipal government is now a purely business proposition, and with this condition has come a general awakening as to civic affairs among all classes. It's a favorable sign when the voters take the time and trouble to keep themselves informed as to the movement of municipal matters. The commission plan law has done more to awaken civic pride in Cedar Rapids since last April than all that happened during the more than fifty years that the city was operated under its special charter.

Immediately after taking office a careful examination of all books and records was made by experts, and as soon as possible the people of Cedar Rapids were given something they had never had before, a full, complete, and absolutely correct statement of the financial condition of the city. It was found that the outgoing administration had expended of 1908 funds, be-

tween January 1st and April 6th, 1908, the sum of \$119,639.12, in addition to about \$5,000 expended by the board of park commissioners during the same period. This expenditure of about \$40,000 per month, if continued throughout the year, would have added approximately \$150,000 to the city's debt. That the 1908 funds remaining were conserved excellently is evidenced by the fact that on January 1, 1909, there were no warrants outstanding unpaid, every obligation had been met promptly, (the current bills having been cleaned up each week and discounted two per cent for cash, the same as any business house) and there remained a balance in every fund in the treasurer's hands.

During these months the sum of \$61,980 was paid for the retirement of bonds and for interest; extensive park improvements were made; additional park property was purchased; the police department was augmented by five patrolmen; the fire department stables were replenished, apparatus repaired and rebuilt, two stations re-roofed and all of them repainted; a fine new brick station costing \$6,000 was brought nearly to completion—it was occupied February 1st; the members of the police and fire departments were fitted out in the best of new uniforms; the streets and pavements were cleaned and repaired as never before in the history of the city; the greatest amount of brick paving, macadam road laying, cement walks and curb construction, sewer building and water main extensions the city has ever known in one season, was accomplished; the work of re-establishing the lines of the river front was prosecuted; the preliminary arrangements for a new concrete bridge, 600 feet in length and costing approximately \$75,000 across the Cedar river, and other minor bridge work, was completed; Charles Mulford Robinson, civic improvement expert, was brought to Cedar Rapids to investigate and report on the city's needs, and following out his numerous suggestions, certain streets have been extended, street signs have been erected, neat waste paper receptacles of approved design have been placed on the business streets, certain street parkways have been established, and most important and noteworthy of all, we have accomplished the purchase for park and public building purposes

of an island of some six acres' area, lying in the Cedar river, in the very heart of the city. This island, which is between and immediately adjacent to the business section of both east and west sides, has for many years been a municipal disgrace. Tenanted in large part by unsightly shacks, and made a dumping ground for all manner of rubbish, it has been the cause of unfavorable comment on the part of all. At various times in the past, efforts had been made to secure this island for public purposes, but these efforts had all met with failure. It has remained for the commission plan to accomplish that which was impossible under the old council system. The city offices are now occupying temporary quarters on the island, and as soon as spring opens, the work of improving and parking the island will be commenced. In due time, the people of Cedar Rapids will erect suitable buildings on that island, and in the years to come Cedar Rapids will be unique in being the possessor of a civic center, the like of which is owned by no other city in the country.

In the face of all this extraordinary activity, we have reduced the tax levy for this year one mill, and plan to make a further reduction in 1910.

There have been other and widely diverse matters that have received attention. The taxpayers are now given, on the first day of each month, a detailed financial statement, showing all receipts and expenditures—from whom, to whom, and what for, of city money during the previous month, and with this is included a balance sheet, so that every one who desires may know, at all times, the exact condition of the city's finances. The people also have, in pamphlet form, a complete summary of the council proceedings. Public funds now draw interest from the banks where deposited, the city's income from this source being nearly \$2,000 since last April.

The police department has been reorganized—not by wholesale discharge of men, but by the injection of needed discipline, and in some unaccountable manner the city's cash revenues from the police court and department have jumped from an average of about \$75 per month last year, to something like

\$700 per month under the new plan, while there has been no material increase in the number of arrests. The baggage wagons, hacks and other contributors to the city treasury now pay their license fees or go out of business; laws regulating meat and milk inspection have been enforced, and the gambling fraternity moved their apparatus out of town on the 8th of last April, and as yet they have not deemed it wise to bring it back.

**Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette. March 31, 1909.**

Commission Plan in Cedar Rapids. Charles D. Huston.

The commission plan of government act, exceptionally good in the main, recognized certain principles necessary to the successful conduct of city affairs.

In drafting the Iowa commission form of government act, it was given out by the framers that the purposes were:

First—They wished to create a municipal office having such attractive features that it would prove an inducement to representative men to seek political recognition. They also wished to eliminate those objectionable features in politics which have heretofore been the means of squelching the political ambitions of desirable men and to destroy, as far as possible, the opportunities for the political parasite who seeks office not for the purpose of benefiting the people, but for the purpose of personal aggrandizement.

Second—The second object in view was to vest complete governmental authority in a small, deliberative body, consisting of a mayor and four councilmen.

Third—The third object was to simplify the present complex municipal system so we might dispense with municipal boards, committees and departments with their over-lapping and conflicting duties. They also wished to substitute for the confusion resulting from a divided authority, a fixed and definite responsibility upon each official for every act of the administration.

Fourth—The fourth object in view was to establish a more democratic form of city government and to provide the means whereby the power of the people might be greatly extended and their control over municipal affairs rendered more effective.



The adoption of this plan was ratified by the voters of Cedar Rapids December 2nd, 1907, and under this plan a mayor and four councilmen were elected March 30th, 1908.

The basic and underlying principles of the commission plan as we view it are:

1. Concentration of executive authority and fixing of responsibility.

2. Elimination of parties and politics.

3. Direct nomination by the people.

4. An open field to all aspirants.

5. Preferential voting—election by majority.

6. The initiative and referendum.

7. The recall.

Principle 1. Concentration of executive authority and fixing of responsibility. How different under the new plan than under the old plan of committees (generally three), often with as many different ideas of procedure and as often opposition to any proposed improvement unless it is made in some particular ward or its equivalent promised before consent to make it is secured, and a needed work long delayed, if made at all, no matter how urgent. Under the commission plan there is no delay. If a certain improvement is needed, is recommended by the head of the department under which it properly belongs, it is made regardless of what section of the city it is in. It becomes a matter to be treated wholly on its merit and no commission will take the responsibility of recommending an expenditure on even one piece of work of which the wisdom may be questioned, and thus subject himself to discipline by being shifted to another department and another being placed in charge to conserve the best interests of the public. As a commissioner in charge of a particular department he must and does take the responsibility of that department. The excuses made by derelict aldermen under the old plan that the other members of the committee overrode him cannot be offered under this. He must make good.

Principle 2. Elimination of partisan politics. This plan is certainly most successful in this respect. The form of the ballot is ideal, without party columns, and without a brand or trademark



to appeal to the partisan, thus forcing every candidate to stand on his merit and reputation.

Principle 3. Direct nomination by the people. The system of nomination by petition eliminates the political boss, whether acting in his own behalf or for special interests. It effectively eliminates the political parasites who live by robbing the people and may in time put them to work. The nominations are made at the polls under such restrictions as govern general elections. Those who attend caucuses and who have observed at some time or another the manner in which caucuses have been manipulated for selfish ends, the good intentions of the majority often being thwarted by a cunningly devised motion which took out of the hands of the people the selecting of delegates and placed it in the hands of those who named delegates to vote for candidates or measures inimical to their best interests, will not be slow to recognize the privilege secured to them of expressing their preferences personally, at the primaries.

Principle 4. An open field to all aspirants. Many men capable of rendering good service to a municipality, would never be able under the caucus system, to get their names before the people, owing to the manipulations of so-called ward bosses, who delegate to themselves from year to year the privilege of making a "slate" and seeing that it is carried out. Under the commission plan, any one can secure a petition and have his name appear on the ballot to be voted for at the primary, and every citizen has an equal opportunity before the voters. To demonstrate how popular this plan is, we have but to mention the fact that fifty-seven citizens took advantage of this provision at the election in Cedar Rapids last March, nine for mayor and forty-eight for councilmen, notwithstanding the fact that but ten could qualify and but five of the ten could be elected. Under this provision the people are given two opportunities to approve or disapprove an aspirant for civic position—once at the primaries and once at the general election. The man who thus passes inspection may be considered well worthy to entrust with the responsibility of government.

Principle 5. Preferential voting—election by majority. Minority election like minority rule is wrong in principle. Under

the commission plan no one can be elected either mayor or councilman unless he secures a clear majority of all votes cast, thus there can be no doubt as to his being the choice of the electorate. Under the old system vicious and "undesirable citizens" have been frequently elected according to well verified reports from San Francisco, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburg and perhaps occasionally in peerless Iowa. Some of those considered in the "undesirable" class may have been fairly representative of their ward constituents but not of the city as a whole, and their power for evil in a council has been great. As a concrete example we have but to refer to "Bath House John" and "Hinky Dink," who have held unbroken sway in their wards for many years and their influence has to be reckoned with always. They are not only a power in the wards from which they come, but being aggressive and ever at work their influence is felt in every department of the city. Clean handed men (not so "practical" as they) shun the notoriety of a contest with them, while others who have exposed their methods to public criticism and scorn have been retired for their temerity, and what is the result? Chicago is known the world over as one of the most corrupt and vicious of cities—not because a majority wants it so, but because a minority wills it so. These men are elected because of the ward system, not because of their fitness, but in spite of their unfitness. There is not a city on the face of the earth, if its affairs were administered under a commission plan similar to that of the Iowa plan, where such men as the "Bath House" or "Hinky Dink" would know they had been in the running—and the plan should be generally adopted if it had no other redeeming feature. But it has others and many. The abandonment of ward lines, means the substitution of a majority form of government for a minority form of government. Under this plan no longer will our city's affairs be managed by a council of ten, the fitness of seven or more than two-thirds of whom have not been approved by the voters. Under this plan the mayor and council are as they should be, the personal representatives of each and every citizen and personally accountable to them all for the economic and successful administration of the city's affairs.

Principle 6. The initiative and referendum—the application of this principle places upon the people themselves the responsibility of government where it rightfully belongs. The initiative and referendum are the most efficient weapons of protection for the people—an insurance policy as it were against graft. In providing the referendum, the commission plan trusts the people to pass upon great questions of public concern by taking the power to grant special privileges out of the hands of the council and vesting it in the hands of the people, those who are the rightful owners, and who are and who should be entitled to say whether they shall or shall not be granted. This means the elimination and does eliminate corporate influences in the selection of councilmen, because councilmen will no longer be able to “deliver the goods” bargained for. It leaves the people free to dispose of their own, as they see fit, instead of as under the old plan, delegating the power to a few who might be unscrupulous enough to use it for the furtherance of selfish ambition. This is a provision that should never be eliminated—the people should not permit it, and honest public service corporations should demand its retention. An effort to get away from this provision on the part of utility companies who exact large remuneration for poor service will but fully convince the public that the commission plan was adopted none too soon. But a company that is honest with itself and with its patrons, that accepts the provisions of this act gracefully, gives good service may exact liberal compensation therefor, and yet so endear itself to the public that it may secure from it the most liberal treatment.

Principle 7. The recall—this gives to the people the rightful power to discharge an incompetent, dishonest or unfaithful servant at any time as an individual has the right to do.

A careful review of the commission act will convince the most pessimistic that its provision will insure a city the most democratic form of government ever known. The act provides for the city every principle and safeguard that has been advocated by anyone. It gives the people absolute control, and through the initiative, referendum and recall, they may, if they

wish, pass upon all acts of the administration. To question the ability of the people to use it in their own interests is to question their ability for self-government. But, should the people even make a failure of it in some cities, they will nevertheless govern themselves more economically and more efficiently than the political "bosses" have exercised in governing them under the present system. Cities have nothing to lose and everything to gain in adopting this plan.

**Cedar Rapids Republican. November 3, 1907.**

**Cost of Commission Plan.**

The esteemed Optimus continues to parade the fact that whereas the present mayor and ten aldermen cost only \$2,500 a year, the five commissioners will cost the taxpayers \$9,500 a year. That is inconsequential. We believe that the Optimus itself is in favor of a board of public works, of three men. Those three men would eat up most of the difference.

As a matter of fact under the commission system fewer men will be employed in the city hall. It would not take a great deal of effort to show that instead of there being \$7,000 against the new plan there will be a large balance in favor of it.

But, above all, there would be the results of concentration of power and responsibility. Five men devoting all their time to the city, and looking after every department and every detail, would easily be worth to the taxpayers, \$7,000 more than the eleven men who now give a few hours a day, or a week to the city. Cedar Rapids is big enough as a business proposition to have five men devote all their time to its affairs. What set of business men would think of spending a third of a million dollars annually, without such ample supervision?

On the question of finances, we believe that the present taxes could be reduced 25 per cent, if we apply in the whole city some of the methods that are now employed in the park commission. There is no argument against the commission plan on the financial side, but the argument is all in its favor.

**Cedar Rapids Republican. November 7, 1907.**

**Interest in the Commission Plan.**

The commission plan of government, on which the people of

this city will vote in the near future, is making headway everywhere. In Sioux City they are now circulating petitions for the calling of the special election. The Sioux City News says that 90 per cent of the men who have been asked to sign the petitions have signed. The desire there is almost unanimous, in spite of the opposition of Mayor Sears and some of the aldermen in that city. Why they should oppose it, is hard to say. They ought to be foremost in working for the improvement of the city governments.

In Sioux City they are confident that the new plan will have a walk away. But Cedar Rapids has gotten ahead of Sioux City, being the second in the state to get ready to take advantage of the wise law passed on this subject.

The provisions of the commission law have been admirably summarized by James M. Head of Boston, as follows:

1. It makes the whole city instead of the ward the political unit.

2. It concentrates and fixes responsibility in the hands of a few men chosen by the whole city.

3. It recognizes to the fullest extent the principles of local self-government, places the responsibility upon the people, and forces the people to govern themselves.

4. It educates the people in all governmental matters.

5. It does away with partisan politics in purely business and local matters.

6. It makes honesty and efficiency in office and fidelity to the public interest, instead of fidelity to a political "Boss" the guaranty of official security and future preferment.

7. It makes the representative careful of his conduct since it must be approved by the people before it becomes effective.

8. It effectually destroys the political "Boss" by rendering it impossible for him to deliver the goods bargained for, since the initiative, the referendum and the recall may at any moment take away from him that for which he has agreed to pay.

9. It gives us in fact and not merely in name "a government of the people by the people and for the people."

Every one of these nine reasons, in the summary, is an argument for the new plan.

Some of those who oppose the commission plan are banking a great deal on what they call the Bohemian-American, Irish-American and German-American votes. They count on these three elements in our population to be unanimously against the new plan, on the theory that it is un-American. We do not believe that the claims of the opponents of the measure are correct. We do not believe that the elements referred to are going to be unanimously against what is designed to be an improvement in the form of city governments. We believe that a great many of the men claimed to be against it are really in favor of giving the plan a trial. They have property interests, as well as interests as taxpayers.

**Circle. 2: 289-90. November, 1907.**

Spread of the Galveston Plan. Brand Whitlock.

Des Moines has gone ahead of Galveston; she has all that Galveston has—so far as charters go—and more; she has a system that is far more democratic, far more radical than Galveston, or any other city in the United States, for that matter. Des Moines has abolished wards, and boards, and all that, and has a commission like Galveston, in which the legislative, administrative and executive functions are all centered; but she has other things, more democratic things. She has the recall, the initiative and referendum, including the compulsory reference of all franchises to the people. This is the great achievement of Des Moines; here, at last, is a chance for real democracy. If the board passes an ordinance which is not to the satisfaction of the people, they can compel its reference to them; they can vote on it, and either approve or disapprove it. This is the veto power retained by the people themselves—far better than the veto power in the hands of a mayor, or even of a governor. The people, too, if the board will not pass such legislation as the people want, can themselves initiate such legislation; this is the old New England town meeting on a large scale; and if any of the commissioners is faithless to his duty or his trust, the people may recall him; that is, remove and discharge him—



far better and safer and more democratic than to have the removal power in the hands of a governor.

And then, too, the provision that all franchises be submitted to the people before they become effective is of inestimable advantage. A street-car company can buy aldermen, it might buy a mayor, it might even buy a commissioner, for a man's official title does not change him; but it can not buy the people of a city; the people are not grafters. The way to eliminate graft is to eliminate the public-service corporations from the control of politics. For, startling as the information may be to many, public officials who are bribed do not bribe themselves; the boodle came from somewhere—it came from the street car company, and the electric light and power company; that is, from the eminently respectable gentlemen who own the stock and bonds, and collect the dividends and interest of these companies—a piece of information, by the way, it might be interesting for certain brave and heroic prosecuting attorneys to know, for with very few exceptions we have yet to hear of any of them really prosecuting the real givers of the bribe. Perhaps, if any of the eminently respectable providers of graft money were to stand before a court in their "moral nakedness," to use the recent picturesque expression of a judge who was lacking in a sense of humor, they might appear to quite as great a disadvantage as any of the unlovely bribe-takers, as, indeed, any one might who should stand in like spiritual nudity in any place other than before the mirror of his own conscience.

Another provision, and perhaps the most important in the Des Moines charter is that which provides for non-partisan nominations and elections of municipal officers. Out there they have adopted and incorporated into their charter Golden Rule Jones' principle that a city official should be chosen with reference to his views on city questions, and not on state or national questions. The party system, carried down into the cities, has been the real bulwark of municipal corruption and inefficiency. A party boss will subscribe to any view on the tariff, provided you permit him to tell you whom to vote for. Party bosses and party machines and franchise corporations and all their

pitiful parasites have long, in reality, been non-partisan; now that the people are becoming non-partisan, they will come into their own.

The Des Moines plan seems to me defective in one way, and that is that by it men have to become candidates themselves, and this is not altogether in the spirit of real democracy. The people should propose their own nominees by petition; but the Des Moines plan in recognizing the principle of non-partisanship in municipal affairs has struck the key-note of real reform.

These movements in the west show the unmistakable drift of the times; the movement, at last, is not away from the people, but toward the people; they are coming into their own. What American cities need is government that will represent the people; when they have that, they will have good government, because at heart the people are good. To be sure, in Emerson's words, "Laws do not make the city"; the people make the city, and when they have laws that record their will, they have order as a result; and all these schemes—the initiative, the referendum, the recall, non-partisan nominations, and the rest—place the governmental power where it belongs, in the people's hands. The commission plan, with these things added, concentrates power and imposes the corresponding responsibility; when things go wrong, the people know whom to blame, and they have at hand an effective remedy.

There is a plan known as the federal plan, tried in Cleveland years ago, which is also excellent. Under that plan the people elected a council and a mayor; the council had the legislative power, and the mayor the administrative and executive functions, appointing directors of departments to administer the city's affairs, just as the president appoints his cabinet. This plan was simple and effective, responsibility was easily fixed, and it carried the power that, in fairness, should accompany all responsibility. But it fell short in that the party system remained in vogue and the people were without that splendid weapon of democracy—the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. Then, too, it retained the ward divisions, which are cumbrous and tend to promote small local feeling, so that the city, as a whole, is



overlooked and lost to sight. Had it possessed these other things, and the merit system, it might have solved more of the problems of municipal government than it has.

But it is evident that Galveston and Des Moines and Cleveland have pointed the way. What they have done, all cities can do and will do. For one city is all cities; they are all alike in essentials, just as people are; they have their individualities, and their special needs and little differences: but, in the large sense, they are all alike.

And so we may say that, so far as charters and paper laws go, the way to municipal reform lies along these lines:

1. A charter that provides simply and directly for a few responsible officials, with a mayor and a small legislative or councilmanic board chosen from the city at large without reference to wards.

2. Non-partisan nominations and elections.

3. The initiative and the referendum, including the submission of all franchises to the people.

4. The recall.

5. The merit system for all employes other than heads of departments: and, most important of all,

6. Home rule on all subjects of purely local nature, the right of taxation, and the police power so far as purely local.

With such a charter a city would be free to realize itself; it would be a city for the people; it would be a city in which each man would have a chance to develop his own life and powers; it would be a city in which, above all, special privilege, the great foe to equality and brotherhood, would be abolished. It would be, in a word, a democratic—an American—city. Of course, the law is not all; it is not even first. Good and wise people can get along better with bad laws than bad people can get along under good and wise laws. The people are everything. As Walt Whitman says: "The greatest city is that which has the greatest men and women. It may be but a few ragged huts; it is still the greatest city in the whole world." But with the people themselves in power and the right law, the American city will speedily become the ideal city of which men have dreamed since time began.

**Citizen's Bulletin (Cincinnati). 6: 1. April 18, 1908.**

Galveston's Commission Plan. Edmund R. Cheesborough.

The Galveston commission government began September 18, 1901. At that time the city was practically bankrupt; its taxable values were greatly reduced; it owed a heavy floating debt in the shape of script issued for current bills; the City Hall, waterworks station, and some of the fire engine houses were in ruins and the street paving in wretched condition. One of the first acts of the board was to secure the services of three eminent engineers, Messrs. Noble, Robert, and Ripley, for the preparation of plans for the protection of the city from calamitous overflow. Their report called for a seawall to cost \$1,500,000 and the raise of the grade of the city at a cost of \$2,000,000. The county built the seawall and the city raised the grade. Galveston county has also just issued \$500,000 bonds for its share of the cost of a \$1,400,000 causeway to connect the island with the mainland. Eighty-five per cent of the taxable values of Galveston county are located in the city of Galveston, hence the entire burden of taxation falls largely upon the city proper.

### *Galveston's Tax Rate*

The tax rate for city purposes in 1907 was \$1.60 and state and county purposes, \$1.16½. Valuations for assessing purposes are quite reasonable, and notwithstanding Galveston's experience and accomplishments, its taxes are lower than any large city in Texas.

The next step of the commission was to get the majority of the bondholders to accept 2½ per cent interest instead of 5 per cent for a period of five years.

The taxpayers were the beneficiaries of this compromise, not the city, as the tax levy was reduced accordingly. Out of current revenues from date of their inauguration into office and up to February 29, 1908, the city commission has paid for the following extraordinary expenses:

Floating debt, inherited from Aldermen .....	\$157,000.00
Brick pavement on sand foundation, at \$1.40 per yard	170,000.00
Shell roads .....	135,000.00
Storm drains .....	100,000.00
Repairs to City Hall, new engine house, new waterworks station and pumping plant. ....	70,000.00
<hr/>	
Total .....	\$632,000.00

The commission has paid off and canceled \$461,953.70 of the regular bonded debt. It has taken care of very heavy expenses in raising water mains and pipes in the grade-raising area and in putting in new screens in the artesian wells from which the city obtains its water supply. With funds received from sale of sewer bonds, just prior to the advent of the commission form of city government, \$150,000 has been expended in extending the sewer system. The city has also purchased three new fire engines, one large extension ladder truck, other equipment and new horses. All obligations of the city have been paid in cash, not a dollar being borrowed and not a bond issued, excepting the special issue for grade-raising purposes. The city maintains a splendidly equipped public hospital, a magnificent gift to the city, at a net annual expense of \$30,000.

The financing of the grade-raising (which cost \$2,000,000), with the aid of the state, has been a splendid achievement.

#### *State Renders Aid*

The city has paid about \$180,000 of its own funds to meet the interest on the bonds issued for raising the city grade. The state has granted the city the right to use the state's part of all taxes collected on property located in Galveston county for a period of seventeen years. With the seven years' taxes so far received, the city has paid off \$504,000 of the grade-raising bonded debt and has on hand, in advance, one year's interest and sinking fund. The city also has funds on hand with which to pay current obligations during the summer months.

All departments of the city are working in perfect harmony

and render efficient service. The total expenses for current purposes for the coming year of 1908-9, according to the city budget, will be \$541,300. This, of course, does not include interest and sinking fund. The city collects interest on bank balances from bonded depositories. Collects a special vehicle tax, which goes to the street improvement fund, enforces sewer connections, has metered the city's water service, has cleared the sidewalks of fruit stands and other obstructions, which have occupied them for years; has prosecuted to a finish all outstanding lawsuits, collects taxes promptly, has destroyed the policy evil and public gambling and adopted an ordinance directing barrooms out of the residence section.

In securing the service of heads of departments and employes, the commissioners have completely ignored political influence. Capacity and fitness alone have been considered. Each commissioner has taken a deep personal interest and a pride in the success of his department.

**Citizen's Bulletin (Cincinnati). 7: 7. April 10, 1909.**

**Des Moines Plan a Great Success.**

Des Moines, Iowa, is just ending its first year under a commission form of government, and the general verdict seems to be that the city never before enjoyed so efficient and economical an administration. Expenses have been kept well within the regular tax income as compared with an excess of expenditure in the last years of the old régime. The merit system has been extended, a new system of accounting installed, electric street lighting rates have been reduced from \$75 to \$65, the police department made more efficient, the so-called red-light district cleaned up, and so on. A dispatch to the Chicago Tribune says:—

The five members of the commission receive combined salaries of \$15,000 a year, and it is estimated that enough money has been saved by stopping small wastes, due to loose business methods, to make up that sum. A business system has been introduced in all departments and the city hall has been changed from a loafing place for politicians to a place resembling the offices of a large business concern. An entirely new spirit pervades it.

For twenty years the city and the railroads have been dicker-ing over the terms of constructing a viaduct, without coming to any conclusion; under the commission the matter has been settled and work is about to begin. The commission govern-ment is also pressing upon the street railway company a plan of profit-sharing with the city after the Chicago example, and lower rates are being exacted of the water supply company. The people of Des Moines are evidently much pleased with their new form of government, so far as it has been tried.

**Citizen's Bulletin (Cincinnati). 7: 7. May 8, 1909.**  
Commission Government.

The extent to which the five cities in Texas having govern-ment by commission, the largest places in that state, are being visited by students of municipal government from all over the country is remarkable. A joint committee from the Illinois legislature, for example, consisting of five senators and repre-sentatives, lately visited Texas, and have reported to the body which sent them. Passages in this report are of general in-terest, as follows:—

In every city we visited we found the almost unanimous senti-ment of the citizens favoring the commission form of government. The enthusiasm for it is hardly describable. Extremists have gone so far as to favor the abolition of the legislature of Texas and substitute therefor a commission of five to govern the state. Without doubt there has been a marked improvement in the con-duct of affairs of the cities. Able, fearless, progressive and con-scientious men are in charge of public affairs. Under the stim-ulus of great municipal improvements conducted in the same manner as the affairs of great private enterprises, these cities are entering upon an era of prosperity, with the full confidence of their citizens in the integrity of their public officials and in the efficiency of the commission form of government.

The spread of the commission idea is further evidenced in the fact that Kansas has a commission law, which was amend-ed at the last session of the legislature, and there are now five cities in that state that have commission governments. Perhaps it may not be generally realized that this new form of municipal control has taken root in Massachusetts. Three of our cities, Chelsea, Haverhill and Gloucester are experi-menting with government by commission. Chelsea is being

rebuilt under a board of control, consisting of five members appointed by the governor. The term of one member will expire next fall, and his successor will be chosen by the voters. One member of the board will be elected each year by popular vote until 1913, when the citizens shall decide whether they wish to continue government by commission. Haverhill and Gloucester are each governed by a single board of five, consisting of a mayor and four aldermen, elected by the people.

**Citizen's Bulletin (Cincinnati). 7: 1-2. July 3, 1909.**

Commission Plan: What it Means. Ernest S. Bradford.

Starting with Galveston, where the new system went into effect in 1901, the commission idea spread first to other Texas cities. Houston adopted it in 1905, as already set forth; Dallas followed in 1907; Fort Worth adopted the plan, and Denison, Greenville, Sherman, El Paso and more recently, the state capital, Austin, have followed suit. In nearly every case the commissioners are five in number and the general plan followed is either that of Galveston or Houston. After the Galveston plan had been in operation a short time, the Supreme Court of Texas decided that that part of the law providing for three commissioners to be appointed by the governor of the state, the other two, only, to be elected by the people, was unconstitutional, and that all must be elected. After the Galveston charter was amended to conform with this ruling, the commissioners chosen in other cities have all been elective. For this reason the government of Washington does not present the case of a commission government, in the sense in which the term is used elsewhere, for its commissioners are not elected by the people.

From Texas the commission system spread to Oklahoma, where three or four cities have adopted it, the plan going into effect in Ardmore on April 1, 1909; and to Kansas, where Topeka, Leavenworth, Wichita and other cities have followed the example of Galveston. In Iowa, Des Moines, as already noted, a city of 90,000, struck out along a slightly different

line adding to the small commission, elected at large, the other features of a recall for the commissioners, a referendum on ordinances and franchises, a non-partisan primary and election and a city civil service. Cedar Rapids is operating under the same state law as Des Moines; and this law has been amended (1909) so as to permit cities of 7,000 to adopt the plan. Burlington, Davenport and other towns are agitating the subject, the successes of the past year in their neighboring cities having had a marked influence on general sentiment throughout the municipalities of the state.

### *It Is Spreading*

The Illinois legislature, in response to a strong demand from Peoria, Springfield and other cities, sent a committee to visit the Texas and Iowa cities which have the plan in force and is expected to pass a law allowing Illinois municipalities to adopt it. About the same time, the people of St. Paul and Minneapolis persuaded John MacVicar, the Des Moines Commissioner of Streets, and one or two other Iowans to come up and tell them about the plan in force in Des Moines, with the result that the Minnesota legislature has just passed (April, 1909) an act providing for introduction of the small Board system in cities of the Gopher state. Both the Twin Cities are said to be anxious to try the experiment which has succeeded so well elsewhere.

A bill to the same effect is pending in the Wisconsin legislature, while in both North Dakota and South Dakota the law is already in force, and Bismarck, Mandan and other cities have the plan well under way; and in Nebraska, a committee of the Commercial Club of Lincoln, including the City Clerk and City Attorney, recently made an examination into the workings of the plan.

At the same time, the seeds of the idea have sprung up in the East and in the Far West. In Massachusetts, the home of the original New England town-meeting, Gloucester and Haverhill have already put it into operation; in Chelsea, which adopted the plan as an emergency measure after the fire (1908),



the commission of five is appointed by the governor, instead of being elected. A distinguished committee of the Economic Club, of Boston, including Dr. Chas. W. Eliot, then President of Harvard University; John D. Long, Harvey N. Shephard, John Tobin and Harvey S. Chase, submitted to the Finance Committee of Boston a plan for the government of that city, which follows, in a general way, the lines of the Des Moines system.

San Diego, Cal., installed commission government May 3, 1909; Berkeley, the home of the University of California, has followed suit, and Portland, Ore., a city of 125,000 has just recently voted favorably on the proposition. Boise and Lewiston, Idaho, are also governed by commissions, while Memphis, Tenn., with 150,000 population, and nearer the home of the idea, is to install its new charter on January 1, 1910. Mississippi passed a state law in 1908, and one city, Jackson, has taken advantage of it so far.

### *Escape from Graft*

And so it goes; in active operation in six states, just adopted in two more, pending in two or three others, and numbering also cities in Massachusetts, California and Oregon, the commission plan has already made remarkable strides toward general adoption. And here it may be well to stop a moment and inquire why this new idea has received so cordial a reception and has been accorded so ready a hearing. Is it a fad in government? Is it merely because the American people are eager to adopt something new that this scheme has made such rapid headway? Or do men believe they see a way out of their old municipal slough of incompetence and graft? Why this rapid adoption of a plan not yet ten years old?

The reply must be evident to one at all acquainted with American men and their institutions. There comes forward a plan with which every business man is familiar; every stockholder in a corporation is accustomed to voting for a board of directors; why not vote for a board of municipal directors? The solid citizen grasps the idea instantly; it is a familiar



one; he knows its workings in business; he understands it thoroughly. He waits only to ascertain the results in cities which have tried it. Much simpler than the mayor and council system, it appeals to him from the first; and the verdict of success, pronounced even by conservatives wherever the plan has been tried, stamps the seal of successful experience upon it. The old feeling that municipal government is a hopeless mess and not capable of improvement or reform yields, in the flash of his sure instinct, to the knowledge that here is the chance to change the whole plan; to locate responsibility with certainty; to tell when he is getting a good administration; to know where his money goes. And the steady rate at which commission government is being adopted means a prompt comprehension of the vast improvement in the proposed governmental machinery over the old way of doing things, rather than undue speed in taking up a new idea.

#### *What It Means*

For the commission idea in essence, means: (1) All the municipal power in the hands of a few men (usually five), who are, individually, heads of departments, and, collectively, the legislative as well as the final administrative authority for the city. (2) These men are elected by the voters and are responsible to them. In the first place, there are only five men to choose, instead of a score, so the voter can know whom he is voting for; then, when elected, he knows whom to hold responsible, and with the addition of the recall (a powerful check on the commissioners) and the referendum (which enables the people to exercise legislative functions directly on important matters), he feels that the wires are no longer crossed; he knows to whom to speak and the commissioner, at the other end, hears. The clutch no longer slips—all the machinery is connected up. (3) Some method of abolishing partisan politics helps to make plain the local issues. In Galveston, a strong Civic Club, composed of public-spirited business men, backs for re-election the commissioners who have given satisfaction, and thus obviates the necessity of their

making their own fight for office. In Des Moines a non-partisan primary and election works toward the same end; it is not possible to vote a party ticket straight, but each name must be marked separately. (4) Finally, a city civil service insures freedom from the worst form of politics in administration. (5) The publication of all proceedings of the council or of the Commissioner of Finance still further aids the voter to decide as to the efficiency of his government; and because he pays his representatives, he is still more likely to hold them strictly responsible for the performance of their duties.

→ The real, underlying reason for the superiority of the new plan over the old way is found in the close connection of the voter with the government. The average voter really chooses his representatives, for he is not confused by the multitude of offices to fill, and can intelligently pick a small number. After they are chosen, they may be recalled; their ordinances may be subjected to the voter's will by a referendum; and published proceedings and statements, plainer and more full than formerly was the custom, enable the average citizen to determine what sort of return he is getting for his taxes.

#### *A Responsible Government*

Too much power in a few hands? No more than was formerly exercised by the city boss or a clique of aldermen, often scarcely known and irresponsible, while the commissioners can be and are held strictly accountable. The exercise of legislative and administrative power by the same body undesirable? It is scarcely necessary to point out that under the usual mayor and council system the members of each council committee do the same thing, passing ordinances as members of the council, while each committee supervises a branch of the administrative work. The Des Moines and Galveston plans simply substitute a small council (elected at large) for a large council (elected by wards), and each commissioner takes the place of a council committee, even sometimes, as in Houston, retaining the title of committee chairman. The actual administrative work is carried out by the superintendents and em-

ployes; only the supervision is in the hands of the commissioners.

The new plan costs too much? At Houston, Galveston, Des Moines and in other cities they show you quite conclusively that the commissioners have saved the city the amount of their salaries several times over.

The plan does not insure good government; no mere system can do that. The people must be alert, interested in their city and its administration and ready to act if their interests are not guarded. No scheme of government can take the place of these qualities on the part of citizens. But what the new plan does is closely to connect the people and the governing body; it enables the voters really to choose their men, to judge their acts with a fair degree of accuracy and to hold them responsible for the kind of government given, retiring the commissioners, if necessary, or refusing approval of their laws; and this fact inspires the hope that American cities can be, after all, well administered; a new feeling that here is a plan which gives the average citizen a chance to determine who shall represent him and afterward to decide whether he is being adequately represented. This is why commission government is spreading so rapidly and so steadily, and why the results so far obtained have been so favorable. Every student of government and every thoughtful taxpayer will scan with interest reports of the operations of this plan in other cities, debating whether its principle can not be applied, with variations, if needed, to his own city.

City Hall (Des Moines). 10: 357-9. April, 1909.

Des Moines Plan: Questions and Answers.

*Leavenworth, Kan., March 19, 1909.*

1. Do you find the commission plan less expensive for the city than your former plan?

Yes, we save about 25 per cent per annum on the actual running expenses of the city under the lowest expense the city has ever had.

## COMMISSION PLAN OF

2. If it is less expensive, about how much are you saving per year?

Find answer in above.

3. Is the city getting better returns for expenditures than heretofore?

We are getting much better service from more capable men, and men who are more efficient.

4. Is the tax being reduced?

Our tax rate on real estate has been reduced possibly  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. Our taxes on personal property have increased possibly 20 per cent.\*

\*(The increase in tax on personal property is the result of a new state law framed to catch such property not before listed.—Com.)

5. Are the laws better enforced?

Yes, there is less lawlessness, and the docket of our Police Court shows less arrests for all causes than heretofore.

6. To what extent have you been able to eliminate politics?  
*We have eliminated politics entirely.*

The plan has been in operation in Leavenworth since April, 1908. The city has about 30,000 population.

(Signed)

E. W. CRANCER, Mayor.

*Des Moines, Iowa, March 19, 1909.*

1. Do you find the commission plan less expensive for the city than your former plan?

Yes.

2. If it is less expensive, about how much are you saving per year?

The saving this year is estimated between \$25,000 and \$40,000, exact figures not obtainable until the completion of the annual report. *The city has lived within its income for the first time in many years.*

3. Is the city getting better returns for expenditures than heretofore?

Most emphatically yes. I believe nearly any citizen will endorse this statement.

4. Is the tax rate being reduced?

I anticipate a reduction next year.

5. Are the laws better enforced?

There is earnest desire on the part of the commissioners closely to observe the law, but I attribute this tendency to the men.

6. To what extent have you been able to eliminate politics?

Ward lines abolished: partisan politics in no degree considered in any appointments so far as I have any knowledge.

The plan was adopted April, 1908. City between 90,000 and 100,000.

(Signed)

A. J. MATHIS, Mayor.

*Cedar Rapids, Iowa, March 26, 1909.*

1. Do you find the commission plan less expensive for the city than your former plan?

Under the commission plan, as adopted by us, it costs more for the salaries of the mayor and city councilmen.

2. If it is less expensive, about how much are you saving per year?

The difference in cost of operating under the commission plan is more than ten times offset by values received in all materials purchased and reduction in prices in all contracts made.

3. Is the city getting better returns for expenditures than heretofore?

The city receives better returns for expenditures than heretofore. All bills except contracts are discounted 2 per cent.

4. Is the tax rate being reduced?

The levy was reduced one mill.

5. Are the laws better enforced?

The laws are better enforced. Formerly the average amount collected per month for fines and penalties was about \$70; under the commission plan the average amount collected is about \$700 per month.

6. To what extent have you been able to eliminate politics?  
The commission plan in actual operation in this city has absolutely eliminated politics.

Commission went into effect April, 1908. Population 35,000.

(Signed)

JOHN F. CARMODY, Mayor.

*Houston, Texas.*

The Mayor of Houston, Texas, instead of answering the questions, sent a marked copy of an address delivered by him at Charlotte, N. C., Nov. 18, 1908.

The following extracts are taken from the address:

Inauguration in July, 1905, the present government found a floating debt of over \$400,000, and an empty treasury. The city virtually had no credit. There was not a single merchant that desired to transact any business with the local government.

However, gloomy as the prospect was, the authorities went about their task with the determination to better conditions.

By the strictest economy we redeemed in the first eight months of our term \$306,202.47 of the old floating debt, besides paying our monthly bills promptly, as well as the salaries of all employes.

In the three years of commission rule the city of Houston has wiped out all floating debt and has given to the tax payer out of the treasury, without the issuance of a single bond, in permanent improvements the sum of \$701,226.74, and has eliminated the floating debt, amounting to over \$400,000.

*It is the first time in the history of Houston that a sinking fund has been created. While these improvements have been going on, the tax rate has been reduced 20 cents on the \$100.*

*My friends, the city of Houston, is very prosperous and rapidly growing. In the last sixty days nearly \$3,000,000 of building permits have been issued.*

**Daily Capital (Des Moines). August 5, 1909.**

**State Experts Like Plan.**

Des Moines' commission form of government is completely vindicated by the report of the municipal examiners submitted

to the state department of municipal accounting.

After a complete, careful and methodical investigation of the city's government under the Des Moines plan, the examiners, M. F. Cox and F. M. Abbott, indorse the system in every respect.

The accounts in the auditor's and treasurer's offices are found correct to the penny and in the remarks following the forty-five pages of figures, the examiners are emphatic in their commendations of the organization under the commissioners.

The report even goes so far as to recommend features of the Des Moines plan as worthy of imitation by other city governments.

A criticism is implied from the remarks on the accounts of the police court as a suggestion is made that greater care be taken in that department.

Superintendent Schramm is praised for his system of receipts and disbursements and the examiners state that the accounts and finance department is "conducted upon strictly business methods."

Mayor Mathis' alleged withholding of certain fees is mentioned in the report indirectly by reference to the \$1,388.25, which the examiners cannot account for "only as it is carried forward from the police judge's account of receipts." They "failed to find any excuse" and recommend that the city have "at least interest on the money."

The report says:

In the management of the affairs of the city of Des Moines, we find nothing but what we can highly commend, so far as the system of keeping the accounts and finances is concerned.

All schedules and pay rolls are countersigned by the auditor and approved by the mayor and in addition to the above, each scheduled pay roll is certified to by the head of each department, and should the council in the future, decide to become a little more harmonious and not antagonize each other at times, when the welfare of the city and each individual department should be in the minds of every member of the commission, the form of government, such as Des Moines now has, would need no defense, for we believe the principle to be correct, after examining the methods of receiving and disbursing the amount of money it takes to run the city of Des Moines.

We find receipts on file for all moneys paid out, and the fact that some branches of the government show such heavy increases in receipts is evidence that this part of the business is being looked after.



The traffic in witness fees has been abandoned and the professional bondsman is being held in disrepute. We suggest though, that some improvement may yet be made in the keeping of the accounts of the police court, realizing that the office force in this department has plenty to do.

In the auditor's department, during the period between April 1st, 1908, and April 1st, 1909, there were 19,374 warrants drawn and there was not a single mistake in amounts or figures, the head of the department and his assistants are all competent and worthy. We found in this department a record of appropriations and expenditures which the debits carried into the account as they appear, and no warrants drawn beyond the appropriation. Also a complete record of all outstanding warrants is kept and carried forward each month, enabling the department to know at all times the conditions of the finances.

The above systems we commend to all city governments as worthy of imitation.

In the treasurer's department we found the record clear and complete, with competent men handling the city's cash. In checking up the treasurer's cash with the amount on hand and in banks, it is made to appear that he has \$55.42 less than the report shows. This is explained by noting the overdraft in the "main sewer fund" of the above amount. His accounts were correct and checked to the penny.

The superintendent of accounts and finances has formulated a system which is a complete check upon all the receipts and disbursements and his department is being conducted upon strictly business methods, the same as any successful enterprise.

In December, 1908, there appears among the receipts of this report, in the general fund, the amount of \$1,388.25, which we cannot account for only as it is carried forward from the police judge's account of receipts as having been collected in a former period. Among the ordinances of the city of Des Moines, it is directed that all money collected shall be turned over to the city on the succeeding month in which it was collected. We fail to find any excuse for the withholding of this amount for nine months and we believe, under the city ordinances, the city is entitled at least to the interest on the money, notwithstanding the fact that the city solicitor has held otherwise in an opinion we would consider dangerous because of the abuses that would naturally follow.

The report was filed with Chief Clerk Alonzo D. Sheets of the municipal accounting department and copies were also filed with the auditor of state and submitted to Mayor Mathis.

The examination commenced with the accounts beginning November 1, 1907. The first part of the report covers the period from that date until April 1, 1908. The second part covers the period between April 17, 1908, to April 1, 1909. This last named portion covers the splendid progress under the Des Moines plan.



**Des Moines Evening Tribune. July 17, 1909.**

**Cost of Des Moines Plan.**

*Statement, Year Ending April 1, 1909.*

Assets .....	\$2,906,427.04
Liabilities .....	1,077,180.34

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Amount of assets over liabilities .....	\$1,829,246.70
Total receipts of year .....	1,322,290.20
Total expenditures .....	998,875.77
Balance on hand .....	333,414.43
Property value, 1908 .....	77,546,580.00
Assessed valuation, 1908 .....	19,386,645.00
Rate .....	36.40

Ten dollars for each man, woman and child in Des Moines.

That is what it costs to run Des Moines for a year, according to the annual report for the fiscal year of 1908-09, issued today. Based on a population of 100,000, it costs exactly \$9.56 for each person.

The total amount spent in conducting the municipality's affairs for the twelve months preceding April 1, 1909, was \$998,875.77, a little less than \$1,000,000. But the receipts, including a cash balance of \$205,141.83 for that period, were \$1,332,290.20, so the city started the current year with a balance on hand of \$333,414.43.

Of the \$9.56 spent for each person in the city, 62 cents went for general government, \$2.47 for the protection of life and property, 53 cents for health and sanitation, \$2.56 for highways, 32 cents for libraries, 58 cents for recreation, 21 cents for cemeteries, 13 cents for miscellaneous, 38 cents for principal and interest on public debt and \$1.76 on outstanding debt obligations.

#### *Lower Than Other Cities*

Compared with other cities about its size, Des Moines' per capita cost is materially lower in most instances. The cost of conducting Lynn, Mass., is \$14.07 for each person; Richmond,

Va., \$17.44. It costs more for other Iowa cities than it does for Des Moines, Sioux City's per capita rate being \$13.22, and that of Dubuque, \$10.26.

But perhaps the best comparison for Des Moines is the difference in accomplishments under the commission form of government and the old aldermanic system. The report shows that the first year's business under the new system was conducted more cheaply by practically \$170,000 than the last year of the old régime. The city was exactly \$224,055.10 better off at the beginning of its second year, under the Des Moines plan than it was when it entered upon its first year. All of this sum is not credited to the superior operation of the new system because an indebtedness of \$50,000 was handed down from one council to the other for several years and it had to be dealt with by the last council under the aldermanic plan.

*Condition April 1*

The following is the way the city's financial accounts looked on April 1, 1908, the date the Des Moines plan went into effect, and on April 1, 1909, the beginning of its second year:

	1909.	1908.
Total working funds .....	\$164,352.05	\$ 72,790.11
Claims outstanding .....	59,496.77	191,989.93

So there was \$91,561.94 more in the working funds at the beginning of the current year than there was twelve months ago, and at the same time there was \$132,493.16 less in debts to be paid. The addition of these two sums gives the amount the city is better off—\$224,055.10.

The following are the amounts spent during the first year under the Des Moines plan by the five departments in performing their duties:

Public affairs .....	\$ 60,784.23
Accounts and finance .....	235,038.02
Public safety .....	231,789.64
Streets and public improvements .....	369,995.23
Parks and public property.....	84,394.86

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Total in all departments .....\$982,001.98

Street improvements alone amounted to \$357,755.50 in the last year. The following is the manner in which it was invested:

	Total Cost.
Brick paving .....	\$111,178.11
Asphalt paving .....	91,993.94
Creosote paving .....	29,993.94
Petrolithic oil road .....	5,430.92
Curbing .....	6,214.00
Combined curb and gutter .....	2,607.61
Sewers .....	102,141.70
Sewer and water connections .....	764.60
Sidewalks .....	7,553.57
Total .....	<u>\$357,755.50</u>

A comparative statement for the last eight years shows that the tax levy was the lowest of any year in that period, being 36.4 on a one-fourth valuation of the property. In 1907 it was 38.7 and in 1900, 40.3.

While the city levies have gradually been lowered the state, county and school have increased. The state levy in 1908 as compared with the year previous was 4 as against 3.9; the county 16 as against 16.3 and the school 30.4 as against 27.9.

The city of Des Moines has personal property worth nearly three million dollars. The following is an itemized list of its holdings and its debit. It shows that on April 1 this year it was \$1,829,246.70 to the good. In other words it had that much more in assets than liabilities:

## COMMISSION PLAN OF

## ASSETS

Cash on hand .....	\$ 333,414.43	
Real estate—		
City hall (old) .....	\$ 50,000.00	
City hall site (new) .....	80,000.50	
Police station .....	23,000.00	
Fire stations .....	200,890.00	
Detention hospitals .....	25,000.00	
Parks .....	767,000.00	
Cemeteries—		
Laurel Hill .....	15,000.00	
Glendale .....	80,000.00	
Woodland .....	105,000.00	
Library .....	420,000.00	
Market places .....	10,000.00	
Bridges .....	679,041.50	\$2,359,931.50
Personal property, all depts .....		213,081.11
<b>Total assets .....</b>		<b>\$2,905,427.04</b>

## LIABILITIES

General bonds .....	\$838,000.00	
Special (city hall site) bonds .....	78,000.00	
Locust St. bridge certificates (*a) .....	56,800.00	
City improvement certificates .....	2,338.40	
Outstanding judgments (*b) .....	707.25	
Land payments (parks) .....	26,500.00	
Land payments (Laurel Hill cemetery) .	11,000.00	
Warrants outstanding .....	41,054.59	
Claim (D. M. Water Co. rental) .....	22,780.10	
<b>Total indebtedness .....</b>		<b>\$1,077,180.34</b>
<b>Amount of assets over liabilities .....</b>		<b>\$1,829,246.70</b>

**Des Moines Register and Leader. June 1, 1909.  
Galveston City Election.**

The practical workings of southern politics have recently been illustrated in the Galveston city election, if the story told in the Kansas City Star by a southern correspondent may be relied upon.

As has been widely advertised, wherever the commission plan is under debate, Galveston has been captured by the "liberal" element. The forces of reform were caught napping and as usual in such cases were easily bagged. The newly elected mayor belongs to the machine that was ousted when the commission government was first installed.

The method of the overturn is of special interest in the north because it illustrates what the south is attempting to do in the limitation of suffrage and what is possible whenever there is enough division among the white leaders to warrant either faction in bringing the colored man to the polls.

Texas has attempted to eliminate the colored vote by the imposition of a poll tax qualification. There are two poll taxes of two dollars each, both of which must be paid in the month of February or the delinquent will not be entitled to vote at any subsequent elections. February is the shortest month, and it is as far removed from election day as it well could be. The colored voter is not encouraged to remember, and he does not vote.

But this year the "liberal" element saw to it that the poll taxes of a large number of negroes were paid. Less than 60 per cent of the voting population had qualified and when election day came around the "liberal" candidates had been elected by some 500 majority. The victory was not marked in a total vote of 5,100. But it was enough.

It is in view of such an election that the importance of the recall as an adjunct of the commission government is seen. The commission government must make good with the average citizen in office and the average citizen can be made into a good official if he knows that his tenure is no longer than the good will of the people whose money he is handling.

Judge Fisher, the newly elected Galveston mayor, in an interview says:

"I have at all times believed, and still believe, in the commission form of government. The people of Galveston may rest assured that, by no act of mine, will the commission form of government be disturbed."

With the recall in the hands of the citizen there would be greater assurance that he would do as well as he says.

**Des Moines Register and Leader. August 10, 1909.**

**Plan Not at Fault.**

"Opponents of the Des Moines plan attempt to make much of the frequent wrangles between the commissioners at council meetings," said A. L. Clinite. "Seizing upon these disagreements they claim it betrays a weakness and therefore the plan is no improvement upon the old system. To my mind the fact that the commissioners thrash out all their differences in open council is one of the most satisfactory evidences of the superiority of the Des Moines plan. Preceding its adoption it was customary for members of the council, most of whom were contractors, to retire to the privacy of committee of the whole and behind closed doors frame up jobs for their individual profit. The public was not permitted to know what transpired in committee of the whole. Now the councilmen discuss and act upon all public matters in open meeting. Thus the public is equally as well informed as to what is going on as are the commissioners. There is no secrecy. Instead of fat contracts, in which I am told the aldermen were often silent partners, being awarded to councilmen or their friends, the work is let publicly. It is noticeable that most of the old crowd of contractors have not fared well since this open policy was adopted. Almost every man one hears opposing the Des Moines plan is an old contractor. In my opinion the plan has worked quite satisfactorily, and I believe the same opinion is entertained by a large majority of the voters. Then compare the aspect of the streets today with their condition five or six years ago. One glance is enough to satisfy any sober minded citizen that the new plan is infinitely to be preferred to the former system, or more

properly, lack of system. The taxpayers are getting something for their money, now. Yet one can observe a getting together of the forces of reaction for a desperate attempt next spring to install the old crowd in the city offices."

**Galveston News. April 17, 1909.**

Commission Plan in Texas. Tom Finty.

The commission form of government as applied to municipalities has become so thoroughly established in Texas, where it was developed, that the people of this state now generally realize its worth and suggestions are heard that it should be applied to county government and even state government. Outside of the state, too, it has been adopted with certain modifications, in many cities, where its value has been tested to a certain extent. Naturally, people of other states, who have taken an interest in the matter still turn to Texas where the test has been most thorough for information on this subject. One of the latest inquiries is as to whether the particular kind of government is calculated to succeed in small cities, say places of 10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants. Heretofore, Texas students of the subject have declared their belief that it would be easier to make a success of commission government in small cities than in large ones. Now they are able to point to results for proof that the commission will succeed in small cities. Here is the record in brief of commission government in Texas,—the names of the cities which have adopted commission government, the year in which they were granted charters prescribing that method, and the population of each of them, approximately:

City	Date of Charter	Population
Galveston .....	1901	40,000
Houston .....	1903	90,000
Dallas .....	1907	90,000
Fort Worth .....	1907	65,000
El Paso .....	1907	45,000
Denison .....	1907	15,000
Greenville .....	1907	12,000
Austin .....	1909	35,000

## COMMISSION PLAN OF

City	Date of Charter	Population
Waco .....	1909	35,000
Marshall .....	1909	12,000
Palestine .....	1909	11,000
Corpus Christi .....	1909	10,000

This list shows that the value of the commission form of government has been proved to the satisfaction of the people in most of the principal cities of Texas, but perhaps the most impressive item is to be added: The fact that the Texas legislature recently enacted a law authorizing those cities (of less than 10,000 inhabitants) which incorporate under the general law to adopt the commission plan. The people in many of these smaller cities of the state have manifested a lively interest in the matter, and it is likely that a number of them soon will avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by the new law.

*Shall Plan be Extended?*

What about applying the principle to county government and state government?

Some of the propositions made along this line, and some of the questions asked in that regard indicate that while Texas people are pretty well agreed that commission government is a success, the reasons for its success are not so thoroughly understood.

"Since the commission form of government succeeds in respect to cities, makes an improvement, it is bound to succeed if applied to counties or to the state," says an advocate of extension. And that reasoning appears to be perfectly sound. The problem, however, lies not so much in operating a commission plan of government for county or state as it does in making the application.

"We already have a commission form of government for counties, and it does not succeed," is an objection which has been made by persons who consider the commissions court of each county, composed of five men and clothed with broad powers, the equivalent of the city commission. The objection, when subjected to analysis, is proof of the assertion already made that



the reason for the success of the commission form of government as applied to cities is not so generally understood as is the success itself recognized.

Have we a commission form of government for our Texas counties? If so, why is it not a success? Why has the commission form of government as applied to cities proved satisfactory?

### *Why Council Plan Fails*

Crossing lots for an answer, it may be said that the commission form of government has succeeded because of its antipodal difference from the old council plan, which latter often proved unsatisfactory for these reasons:

First, with a large number of elective officers the government proved cumbersome and unwieldy, responsibility and power being diffused. When really capable men were elected to office, they found it difficult or impossible to accomplish good work.

Second, with a large number of offices to be elected and generally a number of candidates seeking each office, it became practically impossible for any citizen save the professional politician who devotes all of his time to the subject, intelligently to choose as between the various candidates for each office.

Third, the better class of citizens, qualified and honest, refrained from being candidates for office because (a) it was practically impossible for voters to make intelligent choice as between the candidates, and (b) it was practically impossible and certainly exceedingly difficult for such men, if chosen to office, to accomplish much good therein.

### *Basis of Commission Plan*

Per contra, the commission form of government, has succeeded because, in the first place, the people having fair opportunity to choose wisely as between a comparatively small number of candidates, the better class of citizens, capable and honest, are willing to become candidates for public office; and secondly, because such men when elected are able by reason of the fact that the commission is a small and wieldy body, clothed with adequate powers and under definite responsibility, to achieve their worthy

purposes. This second reason, together with the first, constitutes the inducement for the right sort of men to give their services to the public.

### *County Government Defects*

Perceiving the reasons for success of the commission plan as applied to cities, it is not difficult to understand why our county government in Texas, especially in counties of large population, has often been unsatisfactory. For one thing, the Commissioners' Court, while having great power, does not by any means control all that there is to the county government. There are other county officials, chosen directly by the people and responsible in very slight degree, if at all, to the Commissioners' Court, whereas a distinctive feature of the commission form of government as applied to cities is that the commissioners appoint all other officers of the city, and in consequence have complete and effective control over the entire government. The people look to commissioners and to them only, for results. The other officers and employees of the city look to the commissioners, and to them only, for orders.

This, however, is not the chief difference. The main point of difference lies in the method of selecting the two groups of officials.

County commissioners are chosen by precincts; city commissioners, under the Galveston plan, are chosen from the city at large and by all the voters of the city.

Party politics enters into the selection of county commissioners, in many instances interfering with the free exercise of judgment upon the part of voters. Such is not the case in a majority of the cities which have adopted the commission plan of government, and in none of them where it is giving approximately perfect satisfaction.

Finally, and what is most important, the voter in picking county commissioners is called upon to make a choice as between many candidates, which is not the case in the selection of city commissioners. Not that there are many candidates for a county commissionership; the trouble is that county commissioners are chosen at the same time as other county officers, and precinct,

district, state, and perhaps national officers. Too much goes on during the preceding campaign to render it possible for any save professional politicians to gain accurate information as to many of the candidates.

It seems plain, therefore, that the application of the commission form of government to county affairs would involve four things, viz:

1. Treatment of the county as a unit, electing all members of the Commissioners' Court from the county at large.
2. Vesting the county government exclusively in the Commissioners' Court and empowering that body to fill all other county offices.
3. Choice of the members of said court at an election held exclusively for that purpose.
4. Elimination of partisan politics from county affairs.

#### *Step Backward*

Within the last few years county government in Texas has been set further away from the commission plan than it was before, and this is true in a lesser degree of the state government. Prior to the legalizing of primary elections and the forcing of that system upon the dominant party as to all offices, county officers were chosen in many of the counties of the state without regard to party lines. In sporting parlance, it was "a free for all, and let the best man win." And even where party lines were drawn, generally speaking, the candidates of the Democratic party for county offices were chosen at primaries or at conventions held expressly for that purpose. The local matters were not mixed up and confused with those pertaining to districts, the state or the nation. Now the voter is called upon to make selections during the same campaign, and upon the same day for all offices, "from constable to president."

It must be apparent to the observant citizen that the injection of partisan politics all along the line, accompanied by the partial paralysis of public thought, has weakened not only county government, but state government as well. Whatever may be said of the respective merits of the convention system and the primary election system, it will not be gainsaid by any respectable student

of the subject that the primary system is not to be administered in allopathic doses. Leading advocates of that system have uniformly asserted and contended that a short ballot is essential to the success of the system. Texas legislatures, however, have esteemed it a virtue to fasten the system upon the state under conditions making an abnormally long ballot unavoidable. Moreover, much of the legislation enacted subsequent to the adoption of the system has been such as to add to the ballot and to increase the confusion of the campaign.

Instead of confining the functions of government to existing departments, legislators continue to manifest a disposition to circumscribe the jurisdiction of the same, and without apparent necessity, to create new offices. The desire to make these new offices elective is manifest more often than it is put into effect. The idea with a large number of Texas legislators and other politicians seems to be that the more electing the people do the better it will be for them. This is diametrically opposed not only to the fundamental idea of the commission form of government, but to one of the basic ideas of the primary election system, which is that the people ought to undertake to elect enough officers properly to direct the government, and no more. If they do undertake to choose more, they are apt to choose none wisely.

### *Short Ballot and an Honest Count*

Here is the gospel of the primary election propagandists: "Shorten the ballot. Reduce membership of the legislature. Reduce number of other elective officers. Let these appoint all other necessary officers, clerks and employes. Lengthen the tenure of the office. Elect a part of the officers alternately every two years. The result will be a short ballot and the people may vote intelligently."

In short, the slogan is: "A short ballot and an honest count."

The idea that only a few officers should be elected, and that these should choose the rest, is opposed by some people on the ground that appointive officers are not "close to the people," and because they say the few officers clothed with appointive power

could build a political machine to perpetuate themselves and their dynasty in office.

The answer is, that we already have a large number of appointive officers and have political machines, without the people having a fair opportunity to choose men to make the appointments, whereas were the election system such as to give the people such opportunity, more men of the right sort would be attracted to the public service and the dangers of machine politics would be less consequential.

Precisely the same objection was made to the commission form of government as applied to cities at first but it has been proved to be groundless.

The medium between impracticable pure democracy for large constituencies upon the one hand, and an autocracy upon the other, is a government in which the people elect only enough officers to direct their affairs, and in which the people have a fair chance to elect such officers, in which they have "a short ballot and an honest count."

Obviously, however, it is clear that the complete application of the common principle to the state officers, even to county officers, presents difficulties not met in applying it to city affairs.

**Midwestern (Des Moines). 3:25-8. June, 1909.**

Des Moines Plan. Henry E. Sampson.

During the last year every department of the city kept within the budget, and closed with a balance in the treasury instead of the usual deficit. On April 1, 1909, the city had a working capital, after all bills for the year had been paid, of \$104,855. Compare this situation with that of the city under the old system when, on April 1, 1908, they lacked \$119,200 of enough money to pay their obligations for the year. In fairness to the old administration it should be said that about \$40,000 of this \$119,200 had been carried over from the previous year, but even then the last city council under the old system was \$79,200 behind. By adding the balance on hand at the close of the year of the new administration to the deficit shown at the close of the old administration we find a difference between the two systems of

government of \$184,055. Not since 1890, and but twice in the history of Des Moines, has there been a balance in the treasury at the end of the fiscal year.

In this connection it may be stated that practically the entire bonded indebtedness of the city of Des Moines is the result of these annual deficits of our old city government. Under its unbusiness administration extravagance and waste was everywhere found, and the books of the city show, with two exceptions, a deficit at the close of each year. These have been allowed to accumulate for two or three years; then bonds would be issued to cover the floating debt, and, as a result, the city today is carrying the burden of a bonded indebtedness of \$916,000, upon which the tax payers of Des Moines are required to pay the annual interest of \$37,730.

It may be of interest to the reader to note some of the business methods introduced by the governing board of this new form of city government.

As business men they saw that the funds of the city should be drawing interest, and so set about at once to make such arrangements with the banks, with the result that the city is now drawing four per cent on time deposits and two per cent on daily balances. The interest on the various funds of the city for the year just past amounted to \$9,132.17.

The board of commissioners were also able to make more favorable contracts with the lighting companies. The lighting bill of the city for the year ending April 1, 1908, was \$66,243, while that for the year ending April 1, 1909, was but \$60,694, or a saving to the city in this one item alone of \$5,549. Another item on this bill is now in litigation, and this, if the city is successful, will increase the amount saved by the city on lighting bills alone to \$10,322. The present rate for arc lights is \$65 per year; prior to April, 1908, it was \$95 per year. In addition to this the city has had the 603 lamps, which were formerly on moonlight schedule, burning all night and every night; a gain of 1,818 hours per lamp per year.

**Oskaloosa (Iowa) Daily Herald. April 6, 1909.**  
**Commission Plan.**

The commission plan of city government has been in force in Des Moines for one year. Following are some of the reforms that have been brought about :

1. There is an annual surplus instead of the usual deficit.
2. Service is not only more economical, but more efficient.
3. Streets have been kept clean.
4. Paving has been laid according to contract.
5. Contracts have been let to the lowest bidders.
6. Police department is no longer a political asset.
7. Fire department is no longer part of a political machine.
8. Government has been placed upon a business basis.
9. Business arrangements have been made with public service corporations with immense profit to the city.
10. Water rates have been reduced.
11. Cost of street lighting has been reduced.
12. Negotiations are on for profit-sharing arrangements with the street railway corporation.
13. The "red light district" has been wiped out.
14. The "bond shark" business has been prohibited.
15. Slot machines have been driven out of the city.
16. People are satisfied with new form of government and unprejudiced opposition to it is disappearing.
17. Partisan politics have been removed from the management of the affairs of the city.
18. The city hall has been cleared of political loafers and grafters and now resembles the business headquarters of a large commercial or industrial institution.

These are one and all noteworthy accomplishments and they afford substantial encouragement for other cities to adopt the plan that made them possible.

**Washington (D. C.) Times.**  
**National View of the Des Moines Plan.**

(This is the fourth of a series of articles by a government official dealing with the developments of the commission form



of government in various cities of the west and south. These articles are being written especially for the Times, apropos of the present discussion as to the best form of government for the District of Columbia.—Washington, D. C., Times.)

Des Moines has, in some respects, the most remarkable and successful government of any city of its size in the United States. With a population of a little less than 100,000, with farming and some manufacturing as basic industries, the capital of Iowa presents a case of a municipality which may fairly be called typically American.

Large enough to have some of the problems of the great centers, small enough to be like many other towns, the success with its "Des Moines plan" is of great value to other places. Des Moines has taken the Galveston idea of a board of five municipal directors, franchises, a recall for unsatisfactory commissioners, a city civil service and a non-partisan primary and election. This combination makes a remarkably strong scheme of government in the opinion of most of those interviewed, and it is worth while to inquire how it was initiated, and to examine its results.

The "Des Moines plan" was the result of a natural development, not of a crisis, as at Galveston, and no unusual burst of public spirit can be said to be responsible for its adoption or success. In 1905 the feeling that Des Moines might improve her government was augmented by reports from citizens who had visited Galveston, notably James G. Berryhill, an attorney, and who spoke highly of conditions there.

### *Bill into Legislature*

A public meeting and general discussion led to the introduction into the Iowa legislature in 1906 of a bill to allow cities of more than 25,000 to adopt commission government. The measure failed to pass, but in November of that year the Greater Des Moines club took up the plan; letters in newspapers and general discussion led to a great public debate on January 31, 1907, at which both the Galveston and the Indianapolis system, of a powerful mayor and a large council, were presented.

The meeting decided overwhelmingly in favor of the former plan, and a committee appointed to draft a bill succeeded so well that it passed both houses, and was signed by the governor on March 29, 1907. It took a year longer, however, to get a suit brought before the state supreme court to test the constitutionality of the law, to hold a primary and an election, and to start the wheels running. A great number of candidates appeared at the primary and at the election a mixed ticket was chosen.

Under the Des Moines plan the names of candidates are arranged alphabetically at the primary; the names of the ten men having the highest number of votes at the primary are placed upon the election ballot, also alphabetically, and the five receiving the greatest number of votes at the election are declared commissioners. There are no party names on the ticket; it is not possible to put a cross in a square at the top of a column and vote for all the men. So the voter must know each man for whom he votes, and since he only has to vote for five, his choice is comparatively easy and intelligent. The five men elected appoint all the other municipal officers; the voter selects only the five.

### *Non-partisan Election*

The non-partisan primary and election is regarded as putting a premium on intelligence, and at the same time greatly simplifying elections; it is also said to have practically abolished partisan politics in the city.

The outcome of the election was to place in power a former police judge, two union labor men, a former mayor and a former city assessor, a board not particularly in favor of the new plan. These men began their duties in April, 1908, and have just completed their first year. What are the results?

In the character of the work done by officials and employes, one item which affords fair comparison, there has been a marked change. Where formerly men were retained on account of their "influence" with the council, they are now subject to discharge by the foreman for incompetency or drunkenness. The chief clerk of the department of streets and public improvements states that in the old days it took, in one case, three men a day and a

half to lower the level of a catch basin, a job now of a few hours. Recently the foreman in charge of a sewer repair gang was dismissed because the work of his gang was costing too much, a thing unheard of before. It is the general verdict that more work is done and with better spirit on the part of both the heads of departments and the employes, than ever before in the history of the city.

### *Better Public Work*

In comparative cost of paving, grading, laying of sewers and construction of bridges, it is not possible to make any study that would be of value, since varying conditions in materials, labor, length of haul, character of soil and the like make it out of the question to find jobs of similar size and kind to compare. Careful examination of detailed statements for paving and other work in different ways showed this method to be worthless. Only in the case of cleaning catch basins and in street lighting were conditions sufficiently alike to compare the cost in the year preceding April, 1908, with the year following. In the former case each catch basin cost \$1.40 to clean each time; in the latter, \$1.12.

In street lighting a detailed statement shows the large saving of \$10,322.60 in one year, besides the cancellation of a claim of the electric company for \$4,500. The present rate for arc lights is \$65 per year; it was \$95 per year before April, 1908. In addition 603 lamps formerly on moonlight schedule now burn all night and every night, 4,000 hours per year, a gain of 1,818 hours per lamp per year.

On the financial side the showing is also decided, and, so far as can be ascertained, it is not merely a showing, but a fact. Modern bookkeeping methods are used, the reports of the various departments are carefully checked over and all moneys strictly accounted for. Under former methods a police justice failed to turn over several thousands of dollars of fees due to the city until a careful inspection revealed the discrepancy, and then there was no way of telling whether all the fees were turned over, since the justice, in many cases, had given no receipt to those who paid the fees.

*Good Business Methods*

Money was also allowed to remain a long time in the hands of the county officers before being paid over to the city; it is now secured promptly. Bills are paid with dispatch. The administration which went out in April, 1908, left \$180,000 of outstanding judgments and other claims. This amount the new government took up by issuing bonds and with a cleared field went forward to meet current expenses. A statement by the city auditor, John W. Hawk, shows that on March 31, 1909, the end of the first fiscal year of the commission, the city not only did not have any outstanding judgments against it, but had \$49,472.74 more in its working funds than on the same date the year before. From the most conservative viewpoint the new government has saved at least \$50,000 (approximately) at the same time that it has done more work than ever before in a single year.

The evidence of citizens as to the work accomplished is most convincing. Said J. E. Tone of Tone Bros., incorporated, wholesale coffee and spices:

"The streets and alleys are cleaner under the new plan; one or two jobs of bad paving were not accepted; sidewalks are being laid of uniform width and material—cement with an iron strip for edging. Police regulations are better enforced; saloons are about the same as usual, but slot machines have been suppressed and the red light district broken up, its denizens being mainly driven out of the city, not scattered. The fire department, usually efficient, is even more so under present conditions, and both policemen and firemen present a neater appearance."

*Improvement All Around*

H. T. Blackburn, cashier of the Iowa National bank, corroborated this opinion, declared the plan had worked well, and that merchants favored it as a great improvement over the old government. He, too, emphasized the better condition of the streets and added:

"There is a clear cut division of the municipal work and officials take an interest in their duties." F. J. Camp, secretary and manager of the Brown-Hurley Hardware company, spoke

strongly of the value of better street conditions in the business section. "The new method," he said, "makes it possible to locate responsibility at the city hall for any act or failure of the city government, and there is every reason to believe that the plan will be continued."

A large property owner pointed out the superiority of this new system over the old. "Formerly," he said, "it was frequently impossible to find any one at the city hall; the council, being practically unpaid, gave little or no time to the city's business, meeting nights after their own business was finished. Men should be paid to devote their whole time to the work of the city; this brings responsibility and gives good results."

Editor William Hale of the Des Moines News, and Professor McNaul of Des Moines college spoke enthusiastically of the improvement the methods have brought about. Isaac Friedlich, a large retail clothing merchant, spoke warmly of the good effects of having paid commissioners in the increased promptness of attention to business and the general improvement, and T. J. Williams of the Williams Buggy company called attention to the fact that some of the commissioners had held office under the old government, and pointed out that now the same men are enabled to do better work.

### *Worth Considering*

A moment's consideration of the personnel of the commission is worth while. In view of the wide publicity given to the Des Moines plan, inquiry naturally arises as to the men chosen to carry it out. Are they representative citizens? Do they all come from the same ward? In short, what are their characters?

In the first place it should be noted that Des Moines retains the old name, "city council," to designate its new commission of five. The mayor-commissioner, who has charge of the department of public affairs and general supervision of the needs of the city, is A. J. Mathis, a former police judge and a democrat, who was not particularly favorable to the new plan at the outset. The superintendent of accounts and finances is Charles W. Schramm, previously city assessor. In his department John

W. Hawk, the auditor, was assistant auditor for many years and is an experienced man.

John MacVicar, mayor twice before, is now head of the department of streets and public improvements. He has been secretary for several years of the League of American Municipalities, and has taken a great interest in city affairs. Albert C. Frisk, chief clerk in this department, occupied a similar position for several years.

John L. Hamery, in charge of the department of public safety, is a union labor man, a journeyman painter by trade. He was alderman in 1907 and has made a record in police matters, cleaning up the city with energy and decision.

J. W. Ash, at the head of parks and public property, used to be a coal miner and was a deputy sheriff for one term. He is another union labor man.

### *East Side of Des Moines*

The east side of Des Moines—for the city is divided by the Des Moines river—contains the state capitol and a business section of its own, not so large, however, as on the west side. Mayor Mathis and Commissioner Ash come from the east side; the others live west of the river. There are both republicans and democrats on the board; union labor is represented; there is no tendency discernible to choose the commissioners from any one section of the city, nor from any one profession or class.

This Des Moines plan is the "Galveston plan improved," as one man expressed it. To the commission is given large powers, authority to pass ordinances, to determine the duties and fix the salaries of city employes, to create or discontinue offices, remove subordinates and transfer employes from one office to another. A majority vote rules, the mayor having no veto, Des Moines following in this respect the Galveston plan rather than that at Houston.

With these large powers go three checks of great importance, which make the commissioners strictly accountable to the people—the recall, the referendum, and the non-partisan primary and election already described. Any ordinance not satisfactory to the people may, upon petition of 25 per cent of the voters at the

last election, be submitted to popular vote and does not become effective unless ratified by a majority of those voting upon it. This safeguard is especially valuable in the case of franchises, aimed, as it is, to prevent the council from giving away the city's rights.

### *Under Eye of Constituents*

Moreover, there is a referendum as to commissioners, for the recall is simply a means of referring a commissioner back to his constituents for approval or disapproval. Upon petition of 25 per cent of the voters the man whose recall is demanded must stand at once as candidate for re-election; anyone else may be nominated at the same time, and, upon having a majority of votes, is elected in place of the unsatisfactory commissioner. This promises to be a most efficient means of control. Twice has it been threatened, once in the case of the appointment of a chief of police. It has not yet been actually used. The voters of Los Angeles, however, recently had occasion to use this power and the mayor, threatened with recall, resigned rather than stand for re-election.

Provision is also made for initiating laws in case the council refuses to pass them when generally demanded, but in practice this feature is not likely to be much used, as its mere existence tends to make the board susceptible to public opinion.

Publicity is provided for by requiring a monthly statement of all receipts and expenditures, which is published in the newspapers. A municipal civil service commission has been appointed and has begun work. It will be some time longer, however, before its value can be accurately determined.

### *Severe Penalty*

A severe penalty is provided for bribery and even for agreeing to perform services for a candidate in return for money or other valuable consideration.

Finally, it is provided that after six years of trial any city may return, if it so desires, to its former method of government. The adoption of the plan is also purely optional. The trend of sentiment, however, is shown by the fact that whereas



the first act, that of 1907, made the plan applicable to cities of 25,000 population and over, an amendment passed by the legislature in April, 1909, extends it to cities of 7,000 and upward.

Attend a meeting of the council-commissioners. Around a plain table, on which there are a telephone, a copy of the city ordinances and various papers, sit five men discussing plans, putting motions, receiving communications, etc. There is no noise, no loud disputing, no parliamentary wrangling. All meetings are open to the public; reporters and a few citizens usually are present. The business is commonly completed in an hour or less. Meetings are frequent, often every day. The commissioners give all their time, and receive \$3,000 a year each, except the mayor, who has \$3,500.

### *Des Moines Plan*

This, then, is the Des Moines plan. A city board of directors, elected at large by the municipal stockholders—the voters—are given adequate power to transact all business, but they are subject to recall for cause, and their ordinances may be referred, by petition, to the stockholders for ratification. Their proceedings must be published each month; their meetings are public; their municipal duties are their only business, and they are paid. The showing made by the first year's operation of the plan is likely to result in its continuance, in the opinion of most of those interviewed.

It is true that a majority of the commissioners were in politics before; so it was found to be also in Houston and in Cedar Rapids. But if this Galveston-Des Moines plan can take the average citizen—politician or business man—and make him a fairly careful manager of city business it will do what few mayor-and-council systems have done—it will give us a large degree of municipal efficiency.

### *Why is Plan Better?*

Why does this plan surpass the other? For the same reason that the New England town meeting, to which it is a return in principle, surpassed other methods of reflecting local opinion. It is more democratic. It connects the people and their repre-

sentatives very directly; the commissioners are few enough to be known; each is in charge of a department, and the referendum and recall make it possible for the people, knowing now who is responsible, effectively to control their agents. This control is undoubtedly greater with these two features than without them, unless, as in the case of Galveston, the city is governed by unusually able and unselfish men, and its citizens moved by an uncommon spirit.

Where the people have no vote in municipal affairs, as in Washington, conditions may present a somewhat different aspect, and there may well be a question as to the relative advantages of a single head or a commission of three or five. This problem will demand attention later. Staunton, Va., presents the case of a city with one general manager.

**Wealth (Des Moines). 1: 4-6. July, 1909.**

Year under the Des Moines Plan. Henry E. Sampson.

The city is now for the first time receiving interest on all of her deposits. For the year just past she has been drawing four per cent on time deposits and two per cent on daily balances. During the course of the first year under the Des Moines plan the interest on the funds of the city amounted to \$9,132.17.

By making a more favorable contract with the lighting companies the city was able to decrease the amount of its lighting bill for the year from \$66,243, what it was under the old system, to \$60,694; a saving to the city of \$5,549. If the city is successful in the suit now in litigation there will be another substantial decrease, so that the amount saved by the city on lighting bills for one year will total the sum of \$10,332. The city has also been able to secure a gain of 1818 hours per lamp per year on 603 lamps, or a total gain of 1,126,254 hours.

Under the old administration a contract was let to pave Grand Avenue bridge with creosote blocks at \$4.47 per sq. yard; under the Des Moines plan the city did its own work in paving the Walnut Street bridge with the same kind of material, at the rate of \$4.09 per sq. yard, and saved the city almost \$1200 on the job.

During its last year the old system cleaned 2272 catch basins

at an average cost of \$1.40, while under the Des Moines plan 3861 catch basins were cleaned at an average cost of \$1.12 and 3-10 cents, a saving to the city of \$1069.25.

Under the new plan the city was able to put in a culvert on North Street, at a cost of but \$12.63 per cubic yard, while in 1907, one of its contractors charged the old city government \$17.61 per cubic yard for putting in a similar kind of a culvert on Easton Boulevard.

The city has been able to get closer prices and the advantages of a liberal discount since they have begun to pay cash for what they buy. The total amount saved from this source together with that which was made during the year by some settlements amounted to almost \$6,000.

The superintendent of parks and public property has been renting the farms belonging to the city, selling hay, grain and fruit grown on the city's property, granting concessions in the parks on good terms, and doing his own mowing at three-fourths what it cost the old park board under the old system.

The police department was managed last year for \$8,000 less than was used the year previous, while the health department under the Des Moines plan was supported at \$1,400 less expense than it took under the old system.

It will be noticed from the above that the introduction of business methods into the conduct of the city's affairs has been one of the things which has thus far characterized the administration of the Des Moines plan. Its businesslike management has been in striking contrast with the unsatisfactory administration of public affairs under the old system, and has resulted in a saving of thousands of dollars to tax payers. The commissioners are devoting their entire time, thought and energy to the one great question of how to use the public funds entrusted to their care in the way most certain to provide the greatest good to the largest number and at the least expense to each individual tax payer.

After a careful investigation of the year's work the most conservative would not hesitate to say that the city of Des Moines has been economically managed in every way, and that better results have been accomplished in every department under the Des Moines plan than ever before.



## NEGATIVE DISCUSSION

American Political Science Association, Proceedings, 1906.  
pp. 58-66.

Newport Charter. Rear Admiral F. E. Chadwick.

Newport, with the exception of three years, was until 1853 administered under the town-meeting system. It had, in 1784, made a trial of a city charter, but it was so unsatisfactory that it reverted to the town-meeting three years later.

The town-meeting may thus be taken as Newport's form of government for two hundred and more years. In 1853, when a new trial of a charter was made, the place had about 12,000 inhabitants, half its present number. That it was still not too large for the town-meeting system is shown by the fact that Boston remained a town until 1822, at which time it had 43,000 population. Brookline, perhaps the most admirably administered community in the United States, remains a town, although with a population of 25,000, and an electorate of about 4,100.

Newport, with its city government of the usual kind in the United States—a mayor, a board of five aldermen and a council of fifteen members—was no worse off than most other places. The system is simply fundamentally bad, and can, under our electoral methods, only work towards an oligarchy, and this oligarchy, as a rule, made up, to put it mildly, of not the best citizens. Our cities have copied the patterns of government established for the states, i. e., a governor, a lower and an upper house; a system excellent for a state in which the legislature is a law-making body, but foolish for a town in which the chief concern is administration. So far have we carried imitation, that the mayor of the pettiest city now indulges in his inaugural address, quite after the manner of the President of the United States.

Newport is one of the several small places peculiarly conditioned. It is without manufactures or commerce, and its well-

being depends entirely upon the fact that a large number of wealthy people have adopted it as a summer residence. This class pays 63 per cent of the taxes, the total of which in 1906 was \$573,754.80, on a real estate valuation of \$36,001,600, and a personal of \$11,811,300, or a total of about \$48,000,000. The tax rate was \$12.00 the thousand.

It would be supposed that common sense would lead to the nursing of the goodwill of such a valuable element as are our summer residents, and this is undoubtedly the attitude of the mass of our citizens, but there has not been heretofore the intelligence in the city government itself to recognize this. Broadly speaking there has been not so much an antagonistic as a careless attitude towards the summer people on the part of the government, which, for instance, saw greater advantages in laying concrete sidewalks (wholly at the city's expense, be it said) in the voting districts, than in spending the money on the upkeep of the roads so necessary for the use of pleasure vehicles.

The result of the general dissatisfaction with this crude and unintelligent attitude of the administrative authorities was the formation in September, 1905, of a municipal association devoted to bettering municipal conditions which limited its membership to those who were willing to support principles which may be condensed as follows: the use of the referendum, by which is meant the right and opportunity of the citizens to vote upon all important matters affecting the property and welfare of the city; the careful safeguarding of the city's property and franchise rights and the conduct of its business upon business principles; that citizenship involves a responsibility that can not be evaded or ignored without contributing to the forces of evil; that by nominations of its own or through the endorsement of nominations by others the association will seek to secure the choice of the best men available, irrespective of party.

The municipal election of 1905 did not materially better matters, and it was determined by the association to endeavor to formulate a new charter which might enable the city to work towards something better than what it has been experiencing. A committee of 27 was named by the association, care being taken to select both political parties, and it may be said that, apart

from question of races (and we have many in Newport), that the committee represented every phase of our population.

In the first offgo, the chief idea was to give the mayor much greater power; an idea prevalent everywhere in the United States and indicative of a weakening of the self-reliance so necessary to the continued existence of popular government. A vote in favor of this extension of the mayor's power as a fundamental was thus carried at one of the earliest meetings. Inquiries were sent officially to various places requesting copies of new charters, and private inquiries were also made by members. A letter from the secretary of the City Club of New York, in response to one of the latter, gave a clue which resulted in the adoption of an entirely new course. The secretary said he had heard that Mr. Alfred D. Chandler, of Brookline, Massachusetts, had some particular views as to charters. Correspondence with Mr. Chandler brought his views developed in a bill which he had formulated for presentation to the Massachusetts legislature, but which was never presented. This proposed bill was the outcome of the apprehension of some of the prominent citizens of Brookline that the growth of their electorate might tend to make their town meeting unwieldy. Several tried their hands on proposed charters, but Mr. Chandler's draft, clinging to the town-meeting principle, proposed what he called a "limited town meeting," of 240 persons, to be elected by the whole electorate, and to have the powers of the full town meeting. It was this principle which the Newport committee of the Municipal Association adopted and built upon. The resulting charter, in its essential, is broadly as follows: The governing power is vested in a body of 195, thirty-nine from each ward, to which is assigned the name of Representative Council, which has the powers in general of a town meeting; the executive, in a mayor and five aldermen (one alderman from each ward), elected for one year; these, speaking generally, have the powers of selectmen of a town. The cause of the choice in Newport of the particular number, 195, for the Representative Council, was due to the wards being five in number; to the making the term of office three years; and to the renewal of one-third of the Council yearly. This number was also regarded as



a fair mean; as not too large for orderly procedure, and large enough to be fairly representative of all classes in a place of 25,000 inhabitants. In a larger town it could very properly be raised to as many say as 300, which would not at all be excessive, there being many deliberative bodies in the world of such numbers.

It was arranged that in the first election nominations should be made of thirteen members for one year, and the same number for two and for three years; thereafter thirteen new members would be elected each year in each ward. Under the constitution of the state of Rhode Island, no person is allowed to vote in the election of the city council of any city, or upon any proposition to impose a tax or for the expenditure of money in any town or city, unless he shall within the year next preceding have paid a tax assessed upon property valued at least at \$134. This confines the votes for members of the Representative Council to about 3,800 of the 5,100 of the general electorate of the city. The only persons under the law voted for by the whole of the electorate are the mayor and school board; the aldermen were placed by the charter under those voted for by the tax-paying vote.

The election, in order to separate it from party elections, is fixed for the first Monday in December; nomination papers are filed with the city clerk at least twelve days before this date; all candidates must give a written acceptance of candidacy; thirty signatures at least of tax-paying voters in the ward are necessary to nominate for the Representative Council; one hundred of tax-paying voters of the city to nominate for aldermen; one hundred of the general electorate to nominate for the school committee; and two hundred and fifty of the general electorate to nominate for mayor. No one can sign the papers of more persons than he is allowed to vote for. Though the aldermen must be residents of the wards for which they stand, they are voted for by the whole of the tax-paying voters of the city; the influence of ward feeling which so foolishly and unreasonably exists is thus largely eliminated in the election. Nothing can appear upon the nomination papers except the name, residence and acceptance of the candidate, the office for which

nominated, and the names and addresses of the nominators. Nothing can appear upon the ballots except the name of the candidate, his residence, the office for which nominated, and such other non-political facts as the laws of the state require.

The Representative Council meets the first Monday in January, or at such times as it may adjourn to; it must also meet upon the written request of twenty-five members or upon the request of the Board of Aldermen; such requests to be filed with the city clerk; it chooses its own chairman; the city clerk is the clerk also of the Council; it determines its own rules and judges of the election of its members; its meetings must be with open doors and its records open to public inspection; any tax payer or voter may speak, but unless a member, shall not vote at its meetings; no compensation is allowed its members.

The Representative Council at the beginning of the year elects a city treasurer, a city clerk, a judge of probate, a probate clerk, a collector of taxes, a city solicitor, an assessor of taxes, and all such other city officers provided by law or as may be necessary and proper. It may delegate to the Board of Aldermen the election of any officers not specially named, or by special act required to be elected by the Council; it fixes salaries and defines the duties of officers; it may by a vote of two-thirds of all the members remove an officer for misconduct or incapacity.

A very important procedure was taken from the usage of Brookline. On the first meeting in January, the chairman of the Representative Council appoints a committee of twenty-five members, five from each ward, to consider the budget for the ensuing year, and make report to an adjourned meeting. This report must be printed and distributed to all tax-paying voters at least seven days before the meeting of the Council to consider it. Every one is thus fully informed in regard to the proposed expenditure before the subject comes to a vote. A vote of the Council in favor of any proposition involving the expenditure of ten thousand dollars or more does not become operative for seven days; if in this time a petition be filed with the city clerk, signed by at least ten qualified electors from each ward, in addition to at least one hundred qualified electors of the city, the question must be submitted to the people. A peti-

tion of a hundred qualified electors may also oblige the Council to consider a question involving an expenditure exceeding ten thousand dollars; if this be disapproved by the Council, a referendum to the people may be called for by twice the number of petitioners in the preceding case.

The mayor is president and, ex-officio, a member of the Board of Aldermen. The mayor may investigate all departments and has power to suspend any city official, and bring the case before the whole Board of Aldermen. If the board sustain the charges, the official is dismissed; if not, he is restored to duty. The official has ten days, however, in which to take appeal to the Representative Council, whose action is final.

The Board of Aldermen form the several committees for the administration of the city departments; it reports their condition, with recommendations, annually to the Representative Council, which report must be published; it also attends the meetings of the Council and gives such information as may be required. The mayor and aldermen receive salaries to be fixed by the Council, but may receive no other compensation for services rendered the city; they may not be interested in any city contract nor may any of them, stockholders in a corporation, vote upon a proposition or with reference to a contract between the city and such corporation.

It will be seen that the system developed in this charter is one of extreme simplicity. It unites all legislative power in a single body, and establishes a small committee to carry the authority of this body into effect; it brings back to the people in a very effective degree the authority which has been taken from them by political rings and combines; it separates the municipal from state and national elections; it separates the power authorizing the spending of money, from the power which expends, thus vastly increasing the difficulty of a vicious combine; in the words of the "Explanatory Statement" which accompanied the act when brought before the legislature, it "is absolutely open to the knowledge of all the people; gives the right to every one to speak upon any proposition; allows no opportunity to stifle any question; makes it easy for any one to bring forward any subject for consideration; opens the budget

to full inspection and discussion by the people before it is adopted; in a word, makes the public the master it should be in all questions affecting its civic welfare." It does all this and effectively, in case the people are equal to governing themselves. My own belief is that they are. I have a firm faith in the wish and capacity of the mass of men, if their hands are free, to do that which is best for their community. Were this not so, it is plain that we should always be on the retrograde. Our political woes are due to the fact that the public will has not free expression in our country today, in either national, state, or municipal questions. It is the oligarchic rule which permeates our system, which is our bane. The great problem is to get back to the people; in the Newport charter I believe we have done this for Newport, effectively.

It is of course vain to hope that partisan politics will all at once, or perhaps ever, wholly be eliminated. The idea of always lining up on party lines has become too deeply ingrained in the less thoughtful of our electorate throughout the country to expect this and there are sure to be many representatives in the council to whom petty likes and dislikes will be much more than the city's welfare. How great the influence of such feeling is, was shown in the charter election December 4, when, with three exceptions, the representatives of the summer residents, our chief tax payers, failed of election. Our electorate is not wise or broad enough to see the unfairness of refusing representation to such an interest, and that such action practically establishes "taxation without representation."

A short comparison of our Newport charter with its most antipodal one of Galveston, is not inappropriate. This latter replaces a government of a mayor and sixteen aldermen with one by five commissioners. Three of these were in the first offgo appointed by the governor, but a question as to the constitutionality of this procedure, on the ground that the citizens had no voice in the selection of the officers administering their government, being decided adversely, the whole five are now elective. With these five rest all the powers of the city: the selection of officers, the establishment of ordinances, the levying and assessment of taxes, and all administrative functions. Thus far

the scheme has been very successful; this success being one of course due wholly to the character of the commissioners. The great question is how long the city will be able to elect such. It is safe to predict that it will end, as all such efforts, if experience teaches anything, in the election of the seeker after power, and the city in the hands of its five administrators and governors will be no better off than in the hands of its former sixteen.

### **Defects of Commission Plan. Prof. F. I. Herriott.**

City government, although it is not, as is to be generally assumed, easy to conduct as a bank, must be managed upon business principles. By business principles we mean methods of procedure whereby men obtain the maximum of benefits, income or profits with the minimum of expense. The result can only be secured by efficiency in administration.

In these days efficiency is dependent upon division of labor and central, uniform control and management. Instead of having one man and all men doing or trying to do everything and anything, we separate and specialize. A man confines himself to particular tasks and does this or that kind of work and nothing else. Such sub-division of work develops and requires experts or specialists. To become an expert takes a long apprenticeship or systematic education and study. One who becomes trained thus, who becomes an expert or specialist, is the exceptional man in a community or state. There are but few, if any, besides him who possess such skill or technical knowledge. He does not care much for popular opinion, because he knows that the average man does not know what he knows and cannot know unless he undergoes a similar apprenticeship or education. The expert civil engineer that bridges the canyons of Colorado or tunnels the mountains despises public opinion as worthless. The public says the thing cannot be done; the engineer does it nevertheless.

Caring nothing for, if not despising public opinion, cities cannot secure such expert ability in administration by popular election. No specialist will coddle the public to secure his election; he will not stultify himself, either, by reversing his real

opinion on scientific or technical matters; and he will not ask its suffrages and undergo the horrible mud-slinging of political campaigns. He will serve the public, but only on certain conditions.

If we would secure the expert in city administration, we must obtain his services by selection or appointment and insuring him certainty or permanency of authority, responsibility and support. We cannot secure him or his services in any other way—because city governments are subject to the same conditions that control in private or corporate business enterprises; and only in this way do successful business houses obtain specialists and benefit from their services.

The Galveston plan proposes and its advocates maintain that we secure by popular election at least four city officers to take charge of the technical departments of city administration, viz.: commissioners of "Streets and Public Property," of "Police and Fire," of "Finance," of "Water Works and Sewage.\*" In each case success in the conduct of such departments requires expert ability, either long familiarity with and training in such lines, or technical knowledge and special skill. Universal experience shows that we cannot get such servants by resort to the polls, with the frightful hair-pulling and dirt-throwing of city campaigns. For a brief spell, perhaps, we might succeed in getting men of high average ability, because in the first flush of the revival of civic virtue incident to such a radical change we should compel, by draft as it were, prominent and successful men to take the offices. But such a condition would not last. Public fervor would soon decline, and then poor men, then bad men, would get control, as sure as two and two make four.

The Galveston plan cuts at the very roots of official accountability and responsibility; and, strangely enough, it is because the advocates believe that the reform enhances or secures responsible control that they urge it.

Under its method we first attempt to secure by election experts, which we seldom or never can do. Thereupon these so-called experts, by agreement or disagreement, by lot or by ballot, assign each man to that particular department to which they believe he is best fitted. It will be a marvel if bickering



envy and spite do not develop vigorously in determining such assignments. However this may be, it is clear that such a method of election or assignment will deprive a city of the services of experts in our technical departments.

Another most serious defect is the fact that the commission must, if it fulfills its purposes, constantly upset accountability. The commissioners are expected not only to legislate or pass ordinances, but at the same time to "manage" or conduct the business of the city. Now, they cannot do this without constantly and seriously intruding into the several departments. If this is done, accountability or responsibility cannot be enforced on the part of the man in charge of the department interfered with.

Accountability means that a man charged with a task or piece of work is looked to as individually responsible for its performance. He alone and no one else is held therefor. He cannot divide or split his responsibility, nor can he lend or hand it around. It is specific, direct and personal. Furthermore, if the expert is to be held accountable, he must be given funds and power or authority to take full charge and fulfill without let or hindrance the specific duty required. If some one has power to intervene, and does so interpose, he can neither be held accountable nor responsible.

The Galveston commissioners can thus interfere at any time and in any way with the work of the several departments. If they do not, then they do not exercise their double function of legislation and execution. Each man gets complete control of his department and they severally leave each other alone. Again, they may by collusion agree to let each man run his own department as he pleases, for reasons far from righteous. With so much power it will not be strange if unholy alliances develop.

The passage of the budget bills and regulative ordinances will produce "war" if nothing else does. Each man will seek and demand more funds and more authority or power. But funds and authority will be limited. All cannot get what each insists upon. Who will recede? Who must give way? Debate will generate heat; heat produces fire; and fire burns and scorches; and concord that we are assured will necessarily prevail under



the new plan will go glimmering and the taxpayers will find themselves helpless in the clutches of men who both pass the ordinances and budget bills and also attend personally to their execution and administration.

We doubt if a more dangerous measure was ever urged upon the public than the Galveston plan, whereby the traditions of our law and people are thus upset.

### **Defects of the Des Moines Plan. Charles O. Holly.**

Partially to summarize the defects of this law:

1. The old law prohibits secret sessions of the council, and the new law allows all sessions of the council to be secret.

2. The law dealing with franchises, if it does not leave the renewals and extensions entirely to the city council, at least leaves the question in doubt.

3. Section 8 of the law gives each member of the city council all power and authority over each and every official in the city, and it also gives this power to the council jointly as among its members. This has a tendency to create confusion.

4. In some places the law reduces the criminal penalties for violation of the election laws. These penalties were not very severe originally, and they should have been made more severe.

5. The law, as it originally was, obliges certain public officials to give bonds: and under the new law, no bonds are required of any public official.

6. The law leaves the "initiative and referendum" and the "recall" almost entirely within the power of the city council. This can be determined by consulting carefully Section 18 of the new law.

7. There is no provision in the law for putting a candidate on the ticket as against one to be recalled.

8. Also there is no provision in the law for any registration whatever prior to the vote and for use in voting at the primary nominating candidates.

9. There is no provision at all in the law to protect candidates in the selection of judges of election. The only officials we elect under the new law are five, four councilmen and a mayor. If the councilmen and mayor desire an election, and in my city

they always do, under this law, they are allowed to organize the entire election board, and to put any one on these boards that they see fit in each voting precinct. This may not be exactly true as I have stated it, but it is true to all practical purposes, as will be seen on consulting the law. If the law were absolutely perfect in every other respect, this one defect ought to condemn it.

### **City not a Business Corporation. Vincent Starzinger.**

Advocates of the commission plan attempt to draw an analogy between the city and a business corporation. But there is a vast difference between the two. The prime object of the latter is *private gain*, and its efficiency is usually dependent upon the spur of personal interest. On the other hand, the city, even though it may be subordinate to the state, presents a problem of government in which the *human* element, such as the everyday well-being, schooling, hygiene, and the general happiness of a vast community of men, women, and children, is ever present. And so the courts have held again and again that the city is primarily governmental. In the words of Judge Dillon, "a municipal corporation is essentially public and political in character."

But even a greedy private corporation has a separate body, its board of directors, to legislate, to determine policies, to criticize the executive, and to safeguard the stockholders. Where this principle is not observed, the result is usually disastrous, and the only safeguards of the stockholders become governmental intervention,—almost to the extent of management.

### **Commission: Not a Superior Legislative Body. Vincent Starzinger.**

The contention is made that the commissioners, being at the heads of the various departments and knowing thoroughly the needs of the city, will furnish superior legislation.

The argument is ingenious but a little reflection shows it to be fallacious.

Legislation, being the determination of policy, precedes and becomes a foundation for administration, which is the carrying

out of that policy. The essential thing in legislation is that it reflects the will of the people. "Should the city levy a bridge tax?" Such questions as this should be decided only after the differing interests and prejudices have been considered and crystallized.

Now the ability to administrate usually precludes the ability to legislate and vice versa. To illustrate, an efficient legislator must be a representative of the people, responsive to their will. On the other hand, the prerequisites for efficient administration are *stability* and *continuity* and *technical skill* and *knowledge*. When we place the performance of both functions in the hands of one man, we sacrifice one or the other, usually both.

It is especially unsafe to entrust legislation to administrators. They very naturally exalt and magnify their departments. Says F. R. Clow, one of the foremost authorities on city finance, "The estimates of the department chiefs invariably call for expenditures beyond the city's means of payment." Worst of all each commissioner, knowing little of the other departments, will naturally take the word of its administrative head, especially since he desires the same freedom.

And finally, while it cannot be said that knowledge of administration is of no benefit in legislation, yet the necessary information can be secured without completely fusing both functions in one small body. In the European cities, this is done by making the administrative officials responsible to the council. In a number of American cities, it is done by having the cabinet meet and cooperate with the legislative body. There would be nothing to be gained by withholding the information and as a matter of fact, the city's government has full benefit of the training and skill of the executive officials without confusing legislation and administration in a small executive cabinet.

### Superior Legislation. Vincent Starzinger.

Now let us get our bearings once for all on this ingenious argument that the commission form furnishes superior legislation. The contention is, of course, that these commissioners will more ably legislate because they have an intimate knowledge of

the city's needs, because they represent the whole city, and have the interests of the whole city at heart, and because they act with dispatch in time of crises.

The fallacy of the contention rests in the very structure of the commission form itself. It is continually urged by those favoring this plan that the commissioners are in touch with the needs of their departments. Why don't they say that these commissioners are in touch with all the needs of the entire city? This is what the commissioners must be if they are to pass anything like superior legislation. Their power is absolute. Right here is where the mistake is made. The legislation or policy determining for one department is done by the whole commission. The individual commissioners are at most only administrators. Now, no man would for a moment contend that any single man could know the needs of a city with 2,000,000 souls. How does this work out? One of two things happens. There is ignorant and unscientific dabbling by one commissioner with the affairs of another department, or practically absolute freedom for each commissioner to do what he pleases. Des Moines furnishes both kinds of examples. At one time, intermeddling became so pernicious that the city carpenter resigned in disgust, saying that every time he picked up a saw under the instruction of the street commissioners, Police Commissioner Hamery would tell him to drop it and pick up a hammer. Then the reaction set in as it will in every case where legislation is intrusted to administrators.

In Galveston, today, for instance, not one cent is derived from the existence of valuable franchises. // Is this the superior legislation of which friends of the commission idea speak? What do you and I care how much a commissioner may represent the whole city and how he has the interest of the city at heart, if the form of government inherently makes the demonstration of that interest even worse than inferior legislation? Superior legislation is not to be gained through the attempted election of administration experts under a commission form of government.

**Texas Bulletin (University of). June 1, 1905.****Some Fundamental Political Principles Applied to Municipal Government.**

Whatever may be said as to failure or success, there is evidently something wrong. If there were municipal evils in only a few places here and there, and only at intervals or occasionally, there would be little cause for concern. But when we find these evils from Boston to San Francisco, from Minneapolis to New Orleans, when we find them persisting year after year, when we find them in country towns as well as in manufacturing and commercial centers, when we find them not in some one part, but in all parts of the municipal organization, and adjusting themselves seemingly to every turn and condition, the conclusion is absolutely forced upon us that there is something wrong, and radically wrong.

And yet, at the same time, there is among the people generally the greatest indefiniteness and bewilderment as to what the real, ultimate trouble is. We know the evils well enough—corruption and inefficiency; we know them, not merely in a general way, but we know the details even unto satiety. We know the how and when and where, but as regards the why there are few that have traced the evils beyond individual human ignorance and human greed. Few have traced them back into the social conditions and political organization and told us really why.

At the same time let me call attention to a remarkable contrast. In the national system of government we have a constitution admired by foreigners and revered by our own people—a document declared to be the most perfect work wrought by the minds of men in the realm of politics. So far as the organization of the government is concerned the constitution has stood unchanged through all the changes and vicissitudes of a hundred and seventeen years, during which time the population has grown from four to eighty millions, the area has doubled, and the arts and sciences have transformed the conditions of civilized life and activity. Contrast the above attitude with that toward our city charters—our municipal constitutions—all over this country: dissatisfaction, criticism, and amendment, not only occasionally

and in minor points, but frequently, and often of the most radical character as regards the form of organization, the election of officers, and the distribution of powers.

But some will answer, city government is different from that of the state or nation; that state or national government is a matter of politics, while city government is a matter of business. But what is politics? What is business? To my mind, politics means the determination of policies, the deciding of what ought to be done to promote the welfare of the people. And business, is merely synonymous with money-making, it has no place in American government. In France the government manufactures and sells tobacco as a source of revenue, but that principle is foreign to us. The question of establishing a city waterworks system is one of policy, to be determined according to the interests of the people; and when it has been determined in the affirmative, the questions arising in connection with the establishing and running of the system should be solved according to the same principle—not with a view to making as much money as possible, but to advance the public welfare.

There can be no difference in the nature of government between that of the city and that of the state or nation. It is still government, and nothing but government. Government is the organ of society politically organized, and the characteristic of political organization, or of governmental function, is compulsion. It says "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not"; and compels obedience or disobedience by force. This is just as characteristic of municipal as of state or national government. The only reason for making any distinction between the two as regards business character is that municipal conditions are such that municipal governments are entering more and more upon the management of public utilities; utilities, however, that are all monopolistic in their nature, and consequently are often run, when owned by private corporations, in a manner less conducive to the public welfare than the people have a right to demand. But this is a secondary element, and does not change the fundamental character of the government, and the strict application to it of democratic principles.

Perhaps, however, some will say that the government remains



democratic so long as the people select the officers. I insist that democratic government means government *by* the people; it does not mean that the people elect a man and he governs. That is a monarchy: monarchy need not be hereditary; it may be elective. The question is whether it is the will of the people, or the will of the officer, that is carried into effect; and no government is democratic no matter what form it may boast, that does not give effect, necessarily and absolutely, to the will of the people. But it may be said, the commission does give effect to the will of the people. This is, of course, true to a considerable degree, but so also does a monarch for the most part give effect to the will of his people; otherwise they would rebel. The question is not, as it might seem to be, merely a question of willingness on the part of those in office to carry out the will of the people: granting this, there remains the difficulty that officers or monarchs cannot carry out that will unless they know it, and only so far as they know it. It is often true in the case of a monarch that he is deceived or deceives himself, as to the real will of the people. And here is the chief objection, from the standpoint of democracy, to substituting a commission for a city council, a state legislature, or the national congress, namely, that a commission can not know as accurately as these bodies the will of the people in order to carry it into effect.

Another decisive objection to a commission is that it confuses, even worse than is done at present, the legislative and executive functions. In form a commission is an executive body, small and compact, organized for doing things, and yet there is conferred upon it the whole municipal legislative function, of deciding what shall be done. This matter of the separation of the executive and legislative functions, and its fundamental importance, will be taken up farther on in discussing the powers and position of the board of aldermen and of the heads of executive departments. Here I wish only to state distinctly that by legislative function I do not mean merely the passing of ordinances; I mean the determination of policies, the deciding of what shall be done, whether expressed by ordinances, resolution, or otherwise, to which is accessory the exclusive power of making appropriations.



I have just said that we want a city government so constituted as to effect two things: first, give expression most accurately to the will of the people, and secondly, carry that will into effect in the most efficient manner. We have here indicated the most fundamental characteristic of the government—the separation of the legislative and executive functions—a separation of the function of deciding what shall be done from that of doing it.

Commission is an Oligarchy. Walter A. Webster.

A commission is government by a small oligarchy, even though chosen by the people. It is a form of benevolent paternalism that confesses incompetency in representative government. The history of the development of all organizations, whether governments, church hierarchies, secret organizations, or what not, shows that when a few men are vested with extraordinary power their power becomes centralized and extremely difficult to dislodge. There is every reason for believing that government by commission will operate very quickly toward this end. If it does not it will be an exception to a universal rule.

A commission is a small body. It is almost a maxim that the smaller the body the easier it is to reach and influence. Financial inducements are not the only bait used for public men. Ambition and selfishness influence more men than money, and humanity is still powerfully affected by party, race, and religion. A small board is also very often dominated by one man of strong will, or by a small clique, which is to be deprecated even though they be business men or so-called leading citizens. So too, small bodies have a tendency to perpetuate themselves and it is extremely difficult to prevent it.

When a few men gather around a table continually to solve problems, there is a tendency finally to get into a rut and X by custom looks after one thing, Y after another and Z after another, and if things go apparently right, no one bothers the other's work. This is never so in a popular assembly, where the kicker will always be found. Much as we dislike cranks and men who ride hobbies, their persistency and fighting qualities have time and time again been of the utmost service to the

cause of liberty, and it will be a sorry day when their services are dispensed with in governmental matters.

It may be argued that the people will be the safety valve to prevent abuses in government by commission. They of course are in a representative assembly, but when you abolish that, and expect the people directly to correct ordinary abuses, it will be found that they will not and can not. They must have machinery to carry out their will, for the average citizen knows no more about the financial detail and intricate ramifications of the forty departments of Boston than he does about the administrative features and detail of the New York, New Haven and Hartford R. R. Co.

If there is one thing that experience has demonstrated it is that the masses can not handle financial matters directly in a satisfactory manner on a large scale. The theory of representative government has solved this weakness more than any one thing.

President Eliot has likened government by commission to the New England town meeting. As a matter of fact there is no resemblance other than the fact that a small number of men are chosen by the people to do executive work. A town meeting is one of the purest democracies known. Every appropriation and every dollar borrowed is authorized in the presence of every citizen, who has a right to favor it or to object to it. Both sides of a question are discussed in the presence of all the men who are paying the bills. A single man sometimes arises and tips over a well laid scheme. Under government by commission no ordinary man could defeat a measure advocated by a commission of seven, and yet he might be entirely right. The people govern the town; the commission the city. If it be replied that under commission government appropriation bills should go before the people for approval, then the answer is, how are the people going to vote? For an entire appropriation bill of thirty or forty items, even though they strenuously oppose two or three particular ones; or are the people going to be called upon to vote for each one of a large number of items? If the latter, the ridiculousness of it needs no comment.

It is the fashion nowadays to distrust the people, especially on the part of our business men and well-to-do citizens. As a

matter of fact, ignorance in municipal matters in Boston is decidedly prevalent among our so-called better classes who have taken less interest in public affairs than similar men in almost any large city. If the fifty leading business men of Boston really meant to redeem her at any time they could do it. It is all nonsense to say otherwise. Bad government exists by their tolerance. As a matter of fact, selfishness and a desire for political aggrandizement is not confined to the masses, whose pocket-books are seldom benefited by land deals, street construction, and wholesale improvements. So it is with contracts. If there is a nigger-in-the-wood-pile you will generally find him on Summer or State Street, and not in the tenement house district. The holier-than-thou doctrine is impressive until the mask is removed.

✓ The running of a great city is something more than a business proposition. The city is not a voluntary corporation. "It is a compulsory corporation into which men are born." You must contribute to its support, whether you want to or not. You do not have to invest your money in a private corporation. In business, every stockholder has one thing in view: dividends. This is not so in a city where one locality wants one thing and another one something different. True it is that economy should be practiced and extravagance minimized, but dollars and cents should never be put before the man. The city is a political unit. It is not a business unit. In business the chief function is buying and selling. You trade and bargain; this is all foreign to the fundamental idea of a city. A city raises money chiefly by taxation, and its principal duty is to spend that money in a way that will promote the health, well-being and happiness of the community. In supplying its citizens with water, purity, cleanliness and plenty are essential, no matter what the cost may be, for the advantage to the community is far above any mere money loss sustained by reason thereof.

Children must be educated, even though a burden is placed upon property properly to school the poor man's child. The efficiency of intelligent citizenship as an economic factor and the advantage of a well-read electorate is beyond argument. So, too, our property must be protected by the police and firemen; our streets well kept; our sewerage disposed of; in spite

of expense. The essentials must be had no matter what the cost. In a business corporation the stockholders are not confined by residence to the city or state where their company may be located. A stockholder in a Boston corporation may live in San Francisco. A voter always resides where he votes. One stockholder may have one hundred thousand votes to cast for directors and another one but ten, whereas every voter has but one vote, and the man worth \$10,000,000 has no more votes than the man worth ten cents.

Directors work for their own pocket-books. Government officials work for the public good. No matter how capable they may be they receive no financial reward other than a regulation salary, unless they be dishonest.

Business corporations can speculate with their funds and take almost any kind of a risk. Cities, by the very nature of their being, cannot do this. A business concern must keep abreast of competition, or fall. Cities have no competitors. Business selects its best men to run its enterprises. Cities under any system must select office holders with some regard to locality, nationality, religion, labor and business. This means a compromise. A compromise seldom results in getting the best possible men.

In a business corporation the executive head has no conscientious scruples about discharging men at will. Mere caprice or dislike is often the reason for excellent men losing a position. A man over fifty years of age, whatever his capabilities, is often "oslerized." A business man can pay his help starvation wages and drive them at their work. A city always pays a living wage to its humblest employees; the working day is eight hours, and there is no slave driving. This costs more money. It is not "good business" but it is what any public with red blood in its veins demands. When hard times come, the private employee often loses his job; the city employee seldom does. When men and women get old, penniless, and without friends; when the poor are sick or starving, the city is the guardian angel that protects them all. The cost may be large, but it must be done.

It will be readily seen, therefore, that the government of a

city is much more difficult to run from the standpoint of efficiency, than that of a business concern; above all, when we reflect that many large private enterprises are absolutely dominated by one executive head, without any of the checks and balances seen in governments.

Of course any city government is bound to be inefficient that does not select for the heads of its great administrative departments, men with technical and executive ability, who are kept in their positions for a long period of time. The fact that this is not done in many of our large American cities is one of the chief causes of their inferior governments.

### **Government by Commission. Walter A. Webster.**

At the present time a theory of government by commission seems to be the fad. The reasons urged for its adoption are practically the same as those used in 1885 in favor of an autocratic mayor. We have tried the one-man dictator business long enough. Do not let us substitute seven dictators for one, for if the board of aldermen and common council are abolished and all power is vested in a commission of seven, it is doubtful if it will work any better than our present system.

Government by commission is a theory. It remains to be seen whether it will work well in practice. The fact that Galveston, Houston, and other Texas cities have tried it and that Des Moines is going to try it, is no argument for Boston to try it. The conditions are absolutely different. Galveston and Houston have a population but little in excess of the largest Boston wards, while wards 20 and 21 combined have as many people as Des Moines. Galveston has tried the plan only since 1901 and Houston since 1905, while the first election in Des Moines does not take place until March this year. How can we tell whether these experiments are successful or not until they have been thoroughly tested?

When Galveston started this plan her city had been almost destroyed by flood. In a time of great calamity her men were chosen, when catastrophe had aroused the citizens into an activity that peaceful events never bring about. Of course a fine type of men were chosen. They would have been chosen in Boston

or any other place under similar conditions, and the public of course was ripe for reform. We can tell better about Galveston fifteen or twenty years from now, for every reform movement starts off with faith and hope. At first you get good men and things move along smoothly; then the novelty wears off. The work becomes onerous, the great man is succeeded by one not quite so great, and he, in turn, is succeeded by one a little lower in the scale, and so on.

In proof of this let me cite the London County Council, which organized with éclat with Lord Rosebery as chairman, and Sir John Lubbock as vice chairman, and some of the greatest men in England as members. This was in 1889. Albert Shaw thought the millenium had dawned and that metropolitan problems were solved. Things have changed since then, not but what the Council is a reasonably good body, but it has changed decidedly from what it was. In fact, it had to be reformed in 1907. Increasing burdens meant increased work, and great men of affairs, one by one, have slowly retired. This is the experience everywhere.

If we lived in Galveston, many of us probably would have voted for government by commission, because you can get good men in active business to serve in small communities for they have to devote only a portion of their time to municipal work. In Boston, the commissioners would be compelled to devote all of their time. Hence, you would not get many business men to serve, but men who would be commissioners and nothing else.

In making comparisons with Galveston, it should be remembered that there is great difference in supervising the spending of \$34,000,000 each year in a city with a population of over a million, and the spending of \$700,000 in a small place like Galveston, with forty thousand people. We had a good government in Boston ourselves when we were small. It is since we grew up that our troubles came.

If we are to have government by commission, why should it be limited to Boston, alone? Somerville, Brookline and Newton are as much a part of the real Boston as Jamaica Plain or Dorchester. The chief argument against annexing them now



is that their governments are better than the government in Boston. This is a serious question and one that must be faced. It is doubtful, however, if our suburban cities would or should agree to it.

If Boston is to be run by an elective commission of seven what guarantee have we that the seven will average any better than the thirteen aldermen sometimes elected? By what miracle will the electorate eliminate the unfit? When public opinion has been concentrated upon the choice of one man for mayor can it honestly be said that the heaviest timber in Boston is drafted? Under our one-man despotic rule, in which the mayor is all-powerful over many departments, can we say that our mayors have lived up to the full requirements of their great positions?

One of the chief arguments in favor of a commission is that it is necessarily a small body, like five, seven, or nine. Is this necessarily a good argument? The finest municipal government in Christendom is probably Berlin, with a council of one hundred and twenty-six men. Breslau has one hundred and Dresden seventy. No one has ever questioned the efficiency of German city government, based, as it is, upon a council with a numerous membership. In Prussia only tax payers vote in city affairs, and the large tax payers have a greater voice than the smaller ones. Yet they choose a large council.

We can certainly afford to pattern after municipal government in Great Britain. No English speaking city is ahead of Glasgow in civic righteousness and administrative ability, and yet she has a council of seventy-seven. So, too, Manchester has a council of one hundred and twenty-four, Liverpool a council of one hundred, together with thirty-four aldermen, making one hundred and thirty-four, Birmingham has sixty, and the London County Council one hundred and thirty-seven members.

Most of these places are admirably governed; not theoretically, but in practice. This being so, why should we abandon the ideas that have been worked out in the only two countries where first-class municipal governments exist and adopt a new theory that has never been put into practice in any great modern city? As a matter of fact, the governments of Boston and New York are combinations of a one-man despotism on the part of the



mayor and a hodge-podge commission rule by bodies that are not elected by the people. The people positively do not govern the city of Boston. The council has been stripped of its power in almost everything.

Why not try a democratic form of government in Boston for a while, modelled on the English system; a plan that will get close to the people, that will vest our council with real power, and be free from legislative interference, but one that at the same time vests executive responsibility in a few experts, then, if party politics in municipal affairs were abolished and our councilors elected for a term of at least three years, I believe that we would get good government, for I sincerely think that the vast majority of men in Boston desire a decent government. At present our system is run under the theory that the people can not to be trusted. I believe that this is one of the chief causes of municipal misrule.

**Cedar Rapids Evening Times. December 8, 1908.**

Failure of Commission Plan. Clinton L. White.

Hon. Clinton L. White of Sacramento, Calif., speaking of the commission form of government which was abandoned there in 1893, after fifteen years of trial writes:

The first commissioner was ex-officio mayor of the city, the second commissioner was ex-officio superintendent of the streets, and the third was ex-officio superintendent of city water works. While any two of them could over-rule the third, even in his own department, in almost every instance the board soon came to the understanding that each man was to be let alone in the management of the department consigned to him. This resulted in there being in fact no tribunal supervisory power over the executive of a particular department. The management of the street department, the small amount of work accomplished with funds provided for the purpose and the number of employes doing only a nominal amount of work, but drawing full pay from the city were at times something simply scandalous. The management of the water works system was frequently almost as bad, and these things were not checked by a disinterested tribunal.

In 1903, the people being convinced that we could improve upon this system of government, elected fifteen free-holders to frame a charter. When the free-holders met they were of the unanimous opinion that we should separate the legislative from the executive department. Accordingly, we framed the present charter and under it we certainly have had a municipal government very much superior to our old commissioners' system.

Many objections may be urged against the commission form of city government because of the trades which are made between the members of the commission—"You support my measure and I will support yours"—"You scratch my back and I will scratch yours"—"You appoint my friend as a member of the police force and I will vote for yours as a member of the fire department."

**Cedar Rapids Republican. October 22, 1907.**

Commission Plan. J. R. Palda.

To the Bohemian Independent Political Club of Cedar Rapids, Iowa:

If at first I did not favor the plan, I am now decidedly opposed to it. At the beginning I was against the plan more from a theoretical standpoint. I could discern a deleterious assault upon our system of popular municipal government and a serious injury to all representative institutions that begin with the wards in the cities and with the townships in the counties.

I do not entertain the slightest doubt that the friends of this plan are sincere in their belief that the establishment of the commission plan would be for the public good and that they desire only the betterment of the people's welfare, and it would not be just to attribute to them other than honest motives. But they view the matter from a different, and to my mind, a false standpoint. Every person, even the friends of the plan, must concede that in the abolition of the ward system and in the reduction of the number of representatives in the city council by more than one-half, from ten to four, not counting the mayor, the representation of the people will be greatly reduced and the spirit of American democracy in the administration of the city will be seriously curtailed. And this all the more so because to this

much reduced representation, to these few heads and hands, would be confined a mighty power over the city. They are to employ all officers and employes of the city; they are to rule over everything that the city now possesses or in future may possess; they are to control the order, morals and progress of the city. Everything will depend upon the four commissioners and the mayor. Only a sober thought is necessary to perceive and comprehend the enormous power that would rest in their hands!

Against this power of a few people, of the magnitude of which the friends of the plan must surely be cognizant, as a protection to the people are set up the initiative, the referendum and the recall. They are good provisions, in fact the best the plan contains, but they will in no sense counterbalance the powers granted to the commission. It is a difficult defense against the possible misconduct and inefficiency of the commission, as it requires in the greater number of cases a petition signed by 25 per cent of the voters. Who will undertake the work, and who will pay the expenses of securing such a petition? That is worthy of consideration. Will it not occur to all that the people will tolerate many, many abuses from the honorable commission before they will reach out for their means of defense? That they will remain supinely silent for a long, long time before making use of the initiative, before they would avail themselves of the designated means of protest or before they would petition that the mayor or a certain commissioner be deposed and a new one elected in his stead? The last, especially, is no easy task, because everyone has his friends, and there are many dependent, impotent and business people who, even if they concurred in the merit of a petition of that character, would, through timidity, fear of possible injury to their business and unwillingness to go on record, refuse to sign the petition. They will not "burn their fingers" on account of one commissioner. A much greater security is enjoyed by the people in a larger representation and less power in a council elected from the different wards. I believe in the work and management of a larger number. I believe in a proper representation of the people in every department of life, and also in the administration of the affairs of the city, which is not a business but a composite duty of society. A

great diversity of matters are presented that require much thought and study for their correct solution in the interests of the whole people. The curtailment of representation is a measure fraught with dangers, and followed to its ultimate logical conclusion, must lead us to autocracy. Besides, the initiative, the referendum, and the recall, which are the most salient features of the new plan, can very easily be incorporated into the present system, and it is not necessary in order to secure the benefits of those provisions to force upon the people the attendant dangers and burdens of the commission plan.

So, also, it is possible to secure to the people under the present system whatever of benefit might flow out of the commission plan, such as the provisions against pre-election bargains, the civil service, voting of franchises by the people, monthly statements of receipts and expenditures, annual auditing of books, etc., without incurring the dangers of restricted representation and lodging dangerous powers in the commission.

Viewed from the practical standpoint, the commission plan will not secure us a better or more economical government. There is nothing on which to base the assurance that better men will be elected into the commission. Political parties, which will be eliminated, will not work directly for control of the city, but it is possible to secure the same end indirectly. Besides, the city will not be without parties, and how they will crystalize, only the future can show. It is highly probable that the place of political parties will be taken by parties of office-seekers, surely more dangerous, and destructive than political parties. A contest solely for spoils may be waged besides an exalted desire and commendable effort for public welfare. Both are possible. An honest election contest of public-spirited citizens and also a contest of greed and selfishness.

The commissioners will appoint all officers and employes, directly and indirectly. What large number of persons in the city's employ dependent in a great measure upon the particular commissioners! Will it not occur to everyone that all these people, their relatives and friends will naturally interest themselves in their re-election? What effect will it have? What possibilities! Bureaucracy is possible even in a republic when the

seeds of autocracy are permitted to take root! Its preventive lies only in pure and unrestricted popular government.

It is just as possible that incompetent and unreliable men may succeed in being elected into the commission as were ever elected into a city council. If the people are indifferent at the primaries and election, as has often been the case at the caucus and election, the result will be the same. In that case how much worse off will the citizens be than now, in view of the unrestricted powers of the commission? The very thought is revolting. Even if they should be more competent and more efficient, will a better administration of the city's affairs be the result as is promised? Can one person serve several masters? Can he with success manage such institutions as the water works, the parks and other property of the city as this law requires? Each commissioner will have his department and the other commissioners will only, in a sense, put their stamp of approval upon his transactions; whatever he does or recommends will be weighed and considered as the best judgment of a specialist—a person who gives special attention to that department, and in most cases his recommendations will be received without protest, question or hesitation, as each commissioner will be preoccupied with his own department and will not take time to investigate into the merits of the recommendations. What does that mean? A one-man government. Can that be better than the present? Let every one answer that for himself. Even the most competent will stumble over the block of impossibility, though they devoted all their time to the public. But they will not, and cannot, devote all their time to the city, as was well said and explained by City Attorney Good, who is understood to favor the plan, in his Central Park speech last week. No one can expect or require that the commissioners will give up their business or occupation for the uncertainty of a two years' term of office. They will devote as much time to the city as they will have to spare, but even if they devoted all their time, it will not be sufficient, as I have said, to meet the requirements of their offices. They will have to depend upon their assistants and the meaning of that everyone may easily guess.

The administration of the city under the commission will

not be more economical. Their own salaries will amount to a considerable sum and the employes and assistants will all command a substantial salary as their own contention is that cheap help is worthless. Whether or not they will save anything for the city is a debatable question. If improvements are made, it will cost money, as no one will contribute his labor gratis even for the commissioners. The money, as now, will have to be furnished by the taxpayers. Even if out of the commissioners' wisdom some saving to the city would flow, how dearly bought at the expense of subverted popular government, which the sagacity of our ancestors so wisely provided. Let us not undermine the foundations of American democracy in a momentary outburst of reform derogatory to the spirit of American institutions, especially when no lasting benefits are guaranteed, though many be promised. Much improvement is necessary, it is true, but this is necessary in the people themselves as well as in the administration of the community's affairs. We seek them with all our might, but our hopes lie only in the popular institutions as founded by our forefathers, guaranteeing equal rights and justice to all. Let us not thoughtlessly strike at the foundation of our hopes and aspirations. The ward system is based upon a correct foundation, and needs only development to meet the demands of modern requirements. Let us add to it whatever of salutary features the commission plan contains, and we will then attain *in fact* all that the new law only *promises*. Reform must begin with ourselves, with the individual, and when we scrupulously and conscientiously devote ourselves to the affairs of our community, electing good aldermen and refraining from adding to their burdens by empty and malicious criticism, esteemed and honest people will find it a pleasure to seek office and serve the public. Only in this, and this alone, lies our salvation,—not in a new plan, a plan pregnant with dangers. Do not take from the people their old rights; rather increase and add new ones to them; but first of all, let us learn to understand and to discharge our sacred obligations to society.



City Hall (Des Moines). 10: 258-61. January, 1909.

Municipal Government by Commission.

Mr. Grosser: There are many points of view, of course, from which a thing of this kind may be looked upon. Mr. Huston seems to be especially proud of the primary election. Let me inform Mr. Huston that Chicago has a primary election law, and that while conditions in some wards under this primary law may produce a Hinky Dink or a Bath House John, let me say to you they are not the most corrupt men in their wards, and under the conditions Chicago, I believe, produced the best aldermen that you can find in this country. You may look upon the history of Chicago during the past twelve years and no one can point a finger upon a single scandal in our city council. There is a great difference where you have that law, and there is a great difference between Cedar Rapids and a city into which Cedar Rapids could be put one hundred times. The commission plan of government has been tried heretofore, and while it is in a certain way a good idea, I for one am ready and willing to say it does not amount to very much. The commission plan is un-American, and I want to tell you why I consider it so. Under the commission plan there is placed into the hands of five men executive power, legislative power and a certain judicial power, and I claim that any form of government that places the three cardinal powers into the hands of one set of men is un-American. I think that the legislative power should be strictly separated from the executive power. The commissioners pass the necessary legislation, they execute the laws, and, if I am not very much mistaken, they appoint the police judge, and thereby have a finger on the judiciary department. From that point of view I believe the commission plan is un-American. I rather like the federal plan, elect one executive officer and let him be held responsible to the people.

Mr. Gemunder, Columbus: When this subject was announced I came here particularly to hear it, and I am only sorry that there was only one of the papers read. The initiative and referendum, the civil service and the direct primary law are not peculiar to the commission plan. I think the discussion of these points is



hardly germane to the main point, which is the difference between the commission and the ordinary form of government as followed by the various cities. From the information I can get the commission plan as Cedar Rapids has it amounts simply to four councilmen elected at large and a mayor elected at large, and each councilman becomes a committee of one to look after his department. Now, of course, as to whether this is good or bad will depend. You can say a great deal in favor of a czar provided he has great strength of character. It is so when you place more responsibility in the hands of a few people. I say the system has not been tried sufficiently to warrant any definite conclusion as to its merits. If you will look up the history of commissions you will find that the first commission is a good one. In 1876 the state of Ohio appointed a Gas Commission. As is customary, the first appointments were good ones, but it was only a question of time when it turned right back into the machine, and in ten years it was abolished as a failure. Furthermore, the cities of Galveston, Des Moines and Cedar Rapids are cities very small compared with some others, and what is known as the professional political machine does not show itself with any great strength in cities of that size, but if you take the cities of Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities, there is a powerful machine always at work, and how long do you suppose it will take that machine to get control of your commission? If this commission is composed of men of high character the commission will undoubtedly do good work. The difference between the ordinary private corporation and the municipal corporation is that in private corporations the stockholders and directors are spending their own money. The question is whether if you center all your power in the hands of five men are the checks sufficient. I say, gentlemen, that the trial has not gone far enough, and it will pay us to keep our eyes on this experiment. I think it will prove a failure.

Mr. Oliver, Toronto: In the country I come from any man can run for any office without having to ask for permission from any one. We are free to step out and appeal to the people on our records. We have not got to go to a primary. So far as the Board of Control in the city of Toronto is concerned,

I may say that it was established in 1897. We go to the people every year; we have to come up for re-election every year. By this means I think we have perhaps one of the best forms of government. We do not change our civic officials. Our policemen are handled by the Police Commission; they appoint all the policemen. The police are appointed during good behavior. As long as a civil servant in Toronto fills the position and does the work that he is put there to do he is not changed. We think a continuity of service is the best service in any country or in any city. We have a city treasurer who has been in the employ of the city for more than thirty-four years. Our engineer has been there for twelve or fifteen years, and we have any number of employees who have been in the city service from twenty to thirty-seven years without any change. We are trying to adopt at the present time a new system of paying employees. We have always heretofore advanced men as the Council felt they were entitled to receive a little larger salary. We felt we should put the emoluments on the position and not on the man. We felt that after a man has been in class A or class B for a certain time, then we should raise them up a class and by that means are able to give an increase in salary.

**Iowa Unionist (Des Moines). April 12, 1907.**

**Organized Labor Opposes Commission Plan.**

We recommend to the attention of laboring men who have been led to believe that the movement for a *business administration of the city* means the elimination of the wage earner as a factor, the following report of the action of the Board of Trade of Fort Worth, Texas, immediately following the adoption of the new charter last week.

The Fort Worth Record says:—

According to a decision reached at a special meeting of the directors held at 10 o'clock yesterday morning, the Board of Trade will take the initiative in selecting men for commissioners under the new charter.

The matter was exhaustively discussed by all the directors, and it was decided that as the election of men to be had at the helm of the city government involves the interests of the city, and that it is non-political in nature, there being no organization to take the matter in hand, there could be no impropriety in the board taking action in the premises.

It was then decided that each of the civic organizations in

the city and the Federation of Labor be invited to send five of their number to another conference to be held in the board of trade rooms next Saturday at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when the proposition will receive such action as deemed expedient.

It was especially stated that this is not an effort on the part of the board to delegate to itself the selection of this ticket. Every organization in the city is invited to send representatives to this meeting under instructions or with power to act for their organization as each may determine.

Officers of several of the leagues have already issued calls and the executive committee of the Federation of Labor is expected to take action today.

This movement on the part of the Board of Trade has received practically the unanimous approval of all whose opinion has been expressed on the subject.

The wage earners of Des Moines are just as much interested in economical government as anybody, perhaps more than anybody, and they are and always will be in a majority. So long as the majority rules, and so long as every ordinance is subject to popular approval, on the presentation of a moderate petition which labor can rally on short notice, how can labor be deprived of any of its rights of citizenship, even if the attempt should be made?

In Fort Worth the representatives of labor are invited to assist in naming a ticket for the first commission, or board of directors, that will represent every element in the city. This shows that the commission form of government is not promoted by elements hostile to labor. We hope every laboring man in Des Moines will give a careful reading to Mr. Earle's exposition of the new form of government and prepare to assist in securing a commission when the time comes, made up of the very best and most representative men of all classes in Des Moines.—Register and Leader.

Organized labor was given a voice in constructing the provisions of the charter, which was adopted at Fort Worth. The provisions are entirely different from those proposed in the Des Moines bill, or that are in vogue in Galveston. The Fort Worth people, all working in harmony, eliminated objectionable features in drafting a new charter provision.

In Des Moines, a committee of less than 65 drafted the bill, and organized labor was snubbed entirely. The result is, a bill was railroaded through the legislature that is objectionable in many instances to the wage workers.

It is no argument for the Des Moines plan to say that wage earners are in the majority, and can elect their own members to office. Organized labor is not anxious to elect its own members to office clothed with dictatorial power that the Des Moines plan proposes. The Des Moines plan proposes nothing less than a monarchical form of government, because all but five officers are appointive.

In Fort Worth the laboring people were given decent con-

sideration. They participated in drafting a measure to be voted on. Here is a partial report from the Union Banner of Fort Worth, representing organized labor:

By a vote of 2,178 for and 405 against, Tuesday of this week, Fort Worth adopted its new charter, and for the first time in the history of Texas—and, so far as we know, in the United States—a city is to be governed by a charter in the framing of which citizens in every walk of life participated.

Yes, organized labor as organized labor, assisted in the framing of the new charter and organized labor as organized labor voted for the new charter.

Then under this charter, the city can, when it sees fit, engage in conducting any of its public utilities, and all franchises granted hereafter will have to pay to the city three per cent of its gross earnings.

The board of school trustees will hereafter be elected by the people at a special election held for that purpose alone.

Organized labor has never asked for anything of a selfish nature and we do not expect to live to see it do so. It has always asked for those things which would benefit union and non-union men alike. Naturally, we will expect to see the eight-hour day inaugurated in those departments where such conditions ought to prevail—the water works and electric departments and street work. The eight-hour day for the man who toils is the logical work day.

We expect to see skilled men in all of those departments which call for skilled men—men of the highest skill.

None of the above good features are contained in the Des Moines bill, for the reason that the professional politicians and disgruntled office seekers and unionwreckers who drafted the bill ignored organized labor and other classes, drafted a bill to their own liking and railroaded it through the legislature, but they will never force it on the people of Des Moines, notwithstanding misrepresentation by the three subsidized dailies.

**Midwestern (Des Moines). 3:35-6. June, 1909.**

**Des Moines Plan. W. W. Wise.**

A few weeks ago the Des Moines police matron, under civil service, was discharged by the superintendent of public safety. The position had been held by her for thirteen years; in fact, she had grown old in the service. Her standing in the community was attested by the fact that at least 125 of the prominent club women of the city appeared before the city council upon her appeal. So indignant were they over the matter that they openly and loudly protested against what they claimed was an awful injustice. My opponent, Mr. MacVicar, and the superintendent of public accounts, voted for her retention; but the superintendent of public safety, who had discharged her, in-

sisted upon the discharge being made permanent. Under this wonderful new commission plan law appeals must be made to the council, and if the charges of Mr. MacVicar are true, that a combination existed in the council, of which the superintendent of public safety was the controlling spirit, the latter won his point through that combination. The lady appealed to the district court and was sustained, the court stating that the charges were entirely too flimsy for serious consideration.

A few days ago the superintendent of public safety was criticized by the press for selling some old junk that had accumulated around the police department and not turning the proceeds in to the treasurer immediately upon receipt thereof. The matter was referred to the city solicitor for an opinion, who said that there was some question as to the ownership of the junk, or words to that effect, but advised the superintendent of public safety to turn the money in immediately. A prominent attorney, commenting upon the occurrence, said that no more ridiculous thing could have occurred than for a superior officer to call upon a subordinate, whom he helped to appoint, for an opinion of vindication.

There has been constant wrangling between the superintendent of public safety and the police judge, with threats of removing the judge. The department of public safety naturally becomes the prosecuting witness, as the police department makes all arrests and is naturally very desirous of conviction. Think, then, what a travesty on common sense for the superintendent of this department to have in his charge the police judge, thereby making the court subordinate to the prosecuting witness!

If three political tricksters should be elected as councilmen and control all of the appointments above enumerated, they would undoubtedly make the horde of poor bums and drunks who are constantly at the mercy of the police court pay political tribute and become part and parcel of the machine in power. The patronage of a municipality has caused more trouble and made it more difficult to elect good men to office than almost all the other elements combined. In the past more thought has been given to this subject, in an endeavor to eliminate this feature from politics by state legislation, than along any other single line touch-

ing upon municipal affairs. Comes now the Des Moines or commission plan and annuls all of the beneficial legislation along these lines!

The volume of business for each year was almost identical, and the results were fully as good in 1907 under the old form of government as in 1908 under the Des Moines plan. When one takes into consideration the disheartening conditions under which the business was conducted in 1907, the results were phenomenal; first, the fight on the adoption of the plan; second, the grooming of candidates for office; third, the active campaign for nomination; fourth, the fight for election. There was not a day during the entire year of 1907 but what the atmosphere was surcharged with the muck from political mud-slinging. Moreover, the official pay-roll of 1908 as compared with that of 1907, as they appear in the appropriation ordinance of the two years, shows that of 1908 to be some \$9,000 the greater. This is exclusive of the police and fire departments. If the theory of the Des Moines plan is correct, the increased pay-roll should produce greater efficiency, but the above comparison shows that such is not the case. The Des Moines plan cannot be called a success unless the results attained under it are better than those under the old plan.

Therefore we are brought back to the proposition that there can be good government under a bad system, or bad government under a good system. The results will depend entirely upon the men, as good men will produce good results under the worst system, and bad men will produce bad results under the best system. The question then resolves itself into this: What system will be most likely to make it possible to elect good men? The results above shown must be conclusive evidence to the mind of any fair-minded person that the commission plan of government is not calculated to bring about these results. On the other hand, it furnishes all of the opportunity desired by the ward politician to obtain office and remain in office, and build up a gigantic and irresistible political machine, which the united efforts of the best element in a city would be unable to overcome. The results in the city of Des Moines during the first year under the Des Moines plan give ample proof of the



truthfulness of this statement, when the entire press of the city, the united efforts of the two commercial clubs and the Greater Des Moines Committee, have been unable to keep down bickering, strife and political machinations.

**Plain Talk (Des Moines). January 9, 1907.**  
**City Council Needed No Less than a Mayor.**

City government consists of two things: First, legislation or ordinance-making subject to general statutes; and, second, execution or administration of the people's wishes and will as expressed in the ordinances. The advocates of the Galveston plan contend that cities are creatures of law and hence ordinances are merely executive regulations under general statutes.

If we examine the provisions of the code of Iowa we find that most of the provisions affecting city affairs are permissive or optional. We may levy a bridge tax or not, as the citizens decide. We are not ordered to do so. The code simply puts a top limit to the amount of the levy. The same is true with taxes for water and lighting, sewers, streets and city expenses generally. We need not have libraries or parks or bridges or sewers or asphalt or a hundred and more things common in city government, if we so conclude. The code simply permits citizens to exercise all of the vast powers of taxation without let or hindrance within certain bounds.

The two functions of legislation and execution require different types of mind. Men may be good law makers and councilmen yet know little or nothing about the technical requirements demanded of a civil engineer or chief of police. The directory boards of our banks and insurance companies or great business corporations are made up usually of excellent directors,—of prudent councillors and successful men in certain lines—their advice and experience are valuable; they are cool-headed and impartial judges and will render sound judgments when two different policies are urged upon them—but in few cases would they be good cashiers or field officers or competent to undertake any of the numerous executive or technical positions in



the business of the companies which they legislate for and supervise as directors.

Perhaps the most important work after passing ordinances that should not be lost sight of in our discussion of the proposal to abolish our councilmanic system is the legislative function of supervising the conduct of the executive departments. The council will constitute a jury or committee of inspection precisely as the board of directors do. They can and will cross-examine administrative officers, investigate the results of various methods pursued or advocated, consider relative merits of conflicting departments or business ventures and compare costs and eliminate expensive profitless offices. Being exempt from the immediate interests and prejudices of executive officers, each of whom is anxious to exalt and magnify his own department or office, the councilmen will act both as a court of high resort and as a jury.

The benefits and safety of a council are the supreme safeguards of a city democracy precisely as a board of directors are guardians of the interests of depositors and stock holders of banks. A city cannot get along with one-man power more safely than banks or corporations can afford to dispense with their directory boards. We can't get perfection with human nature and human interests what they are and are likely to be.

**Plain Talk (Des Moines). January 16, 1907.**

Some Facts and Figures. W. N. Jordan.

To the Members of the Polk County Republican Club:  
Gentlemen:—

We, your committee, who were appointed to look into the form of government for Galveston, Indianapolis, and Des Moines, have the honor to report as follows:

Des Moines has lowered her city tax levy from 41.5 mills in 1900 to 39.7 mills in 1906. Indianapolis has increased her tax levy from 60 cents on the one hundred dollars in 1899 to 88 cents in 1906.

In Indianapolis, the library tax is not included in the city tax, nor is the library or park tax included on the Des Moines rate on the one hundred. In Des Moines, the city builds and

sustains the library. In Indianapolis, the library is cared for entirely, and is a part of the school system. Galveston is free from the library tax for building and maintenance. She has an endowment of \$400,000.00 left her by a patriotic citizen, thus saving \$16,000.00 over Des Moines per year.

The fact that Indianapolis covers so much less territory than Des Moines should appeal to any business man that the expenses of government are much less in a solidly compact area.

The great mistake that Des Moines made was in paying for her improvements as she went along, instead of following the system of bonding the town for permanent improvements, as is followed in Indianapolis and Galveston.

Des Moines, cursed with its enormous territory, like a millstone around her neck, will always be a more expensive plant for government purposes than Indianapolis, whatever system you have, Des Moines, Indianapolis, Galveston, Houston, or Minneapolis.

Des Moines has no contingent liability in its paving special assessment tax, whereas Indianapolis has a contingent liability on about \$2,000,000.00.

Neither Galveston nor Indianapolis derives any appreciable revenue from its franchises, any more than does Des Moines, but the spirit of Indianapolis is rather to demand perfect service from the gas company, the water company, the street car company, telephone and electric companies, and a reduction in price to the people rather than a revenue-bearing investment for the city as a whole. None of the said indebtedness was incurred in the building of the great sea wall, that being built from county funds. Of the income of Galveston, she spends \$83,000.00 for grade raising, while Des Moines spends annually a grading fund amounting to \$45,000.00.

Of the street cleaning fund, Indianapolis pays \$65,000.00 by contract for sprinkling unimproved streets: Des Moines spends none.

Indianapolis pays \$52,000.00 a year for removal of garbage. which garbage includes only organic matter.

The Galveston police department cost \$42,900.00, Des Moines \$87,150.00, Indianapolis \$257,509.50, last year, 1905. Galveston

had five murders and forty-five attempted murders; Des Moines records show one murder; two deaths with suspicion of murder, and fourteen attempted murders for the same year. Indianapolis, in the fall of 1906, had two policemen killed and the murderers are unapprehended. One thousand prisoners pass through the police court monthly, and the newspapers eternally roast the police department.

Galveston fire department cost for maintenance \$52,830.00 in 1906; Des Moines, in 1906, \$113,500.00; Indianapolis, \$275,981.75.

Galveston park system cost \$2,000.00 during the year and Des Moines \$60,000.00 for purchase and maintenance, and Indianapolis, \$118,700.00, of which \$30,000.00 was contributed from other sources.

Galveston has no bridges and Marion County builds them all in Indianapolis, while Des Moines pays \$50,000.00 a year to construct and maintain its bridges.

Galveston has eight public schools, maintained at a cost of \$78,000.00, one third of which is paid by the state. Of the buildings, the two largest were gifts from the men whose names they bear.

Des Moines has fifty-four public schools, and it pays annually \$477,000.00 for their support.

Donations from philanthropists have built Galveston her two largest school buildings, sixteen fountains, the Y. M. C. A. building, public library, orphans' home, the old people's home, and hospital. The United States government has spent more than \$6,000,000.00 in making improvements in the city.

Indianapolis invited the national Saengerfest to meet in their city next year, and they discovered to their dismay that they had no building large enough to entertain the assembly. The city officers of the city of Indianapolis are all housed in the basement of the Court House. It is true that they have a building nearly twice as large as the City Hall, and well built, known as the Tomlinson House. If the city vacates the rooms in the Court House, they could easily be housed in this hall. Adjoining this hall is a plat of ground, used as a market place, (also given to the city, on condition that a market place be maintained

there). The mayor, in order to fulfill his agreement in entertaining the Saengerfest, conceived the brilliant idea of building a coliseum, (called the Coliseum, City Hall, and Market Place). To a limited extent it will be used as a city hall and market place. So he called his city council together and appropriated \$300,000.00 for the erection of this coliseum, in which to entertain the Saengerfest. This action is denounced by leading lawyers as illegal and high-handed.

There is another thing which aroused the fierce indignation of the citizens, and the cry of graft was heard from street-corner to street-corner. That was the granting of a franchise known as the Merchants' Heat & Light Co. without a dollar of benefit to the city. It was voted to the leaders of the faction which was in control of the city government.

Some years ago, the Consumers' Gas Co. laid their mains in the city of Indianapolis, and under a contract with the city, the city had the first option by appraisement of the purchase of these gas mains. On the 13th day of November, the city of Indianapolis appraised the mains of the franchise at one hundred dollars and disposed of the same to the Citizens' Gas Co.

The matter is now in court. A rival gas company with an authorized capital of \$1,000,000.00 of which they have \$500,000.00 subscribed and \$30,000.00 in cash paid in, have offered to furnish the city of Indianapolis with artificial gas at 60 cents per 1,000 feet, whereas the city is now paying 90 cents. The public is and has been for a long time, demanding to know why the city would sell a franchise including valuable mains and connections for \$100.00 furnishing gas at 90 cents and refuse to grant a franchise to a company, both willing and able to furnish gas at 60 cents to the common people.

Let us take one illustration: Indianapolis has always manifested toward municipal corporations a liberal spirit in marked contrast with the hell-hounding spirit manifested by some of our citizens toward the civic corporations.

Indiana has a law by which the Board of Public Works may open a street through private property and off-set the benefits against the damages to the abutting property owner. The practical result of this law is that it seldom costs the city

a very appreciable sum of money to open a street. Such a law could not be enacted in Iowa without a constitutional amendment.

In Indianapolis, all improvements are in the hands of the Board of Public Works. Like all other officers (excepting the city council, and city clerk), they are appointed by the mayor, and hold office during his pleasure. The Board of Public Works decide upon what street shall be improved, issue orders for the curbing, paving, sewers and sidewalks, and they decide on the kind of material and the price thereof.

The work proceeds without the consultation of the citizens thereof unless the abutting property owners file a protest with the city council. The city council is composed of twenty-one men, fifteen of whom are elected from the fifteen wards of the city, respectively, and six aldermen-at-large. If the protest is sustained by fifteen votes of the council, the work ceases. I asked an alderman if the protests of the property owners were ever sustained, and he answered "No."

In Des Moines, a majority of the abutting property owners may petition for any improvement, or seven members of the city council may order an improvement without consultation with the abutting property owner. But they never do it. Why? Because they believe the people who pay for the improvements should be consulted.

The city government of Indianapolis is on the federal plan. The elective officers are the mayor, city clerk, and aldermen. The mayor appoints the three members of the Board of Public Works, and at a salary of \$2,000.00 each per annum; three members of the Board of Public Safety; and the members of the Board of Public Health, the controller, the engineer, and all other officers in the government from the lowest to the highest, except those I have stated are elected. This plan has been in force seventeen years.

The Galveston system is one of commission, composed of five commissioners, who transact all of the business of the city, and the Galveston system proves much more expensive than that of Des Moines.

Of the Galveston debt, \$1,030,000.00 was bond issue for the

purpose of raising the grade of the city, and the state of Texas remitted all county and state taxes collected in Galveston for a period of seventeen years to pay this debt.

When a franchise is asked of the city of Indianapolis, it must have the approval of the mayor, who sends it to the Board of Public Works (his appointees). It lies on the desk of the Board of Public Works for two weeks, and must have their approval. Then it is sent to the city council wherein it lies two weeks and must be passed by a two-thirds vote. There is no referendum. (No vote by the people.)

The city council has but little to do except the passing of the annual budget once a year, passing some ordinances and voting on franchises. The mayor and the members of the city council rapidly come to an agreement and understanding.

The city of Indianapolis is not any freer from the charge of graft and corruption in office than is Des Moines. Whether there is any foundation in fact for such charges, I cannot, of course, say.

Take the Chicago, Indianapolis, & Evansville franchise, which was put through the council early in 1906. The franchise gave them the right to pass through important business and residential portions of the city, and a further privilege of building a freight depot in the square, immediately across the street from the State House (a beautiful place for a freight yard). The public at large cannot find out who is back of the enterprise. Whether the company is a corporation on a substantial basis, or not, is unknown. This was so bitterly fought and denounced, that the criminal judge directed the Grand Jury at the two last terms to probe the matter to the bottom.

Another matter that was put through the city council by the mayor was the modification of the Indiana Southern, franchise or contract, which permitted them to change from elevated tracks down to the grade level at Merrill street and run into the Union Depot. This modification took place in the face of the state law, which now requires the elevation of the street railways, with damages to the abutting property owners, of which damages the city shall pay  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent.

There was another thing which aroused the enraged feel-

ings of the citizens of Indianapolis. The legislature was contemplating a bill compelling the elevation of the street railway tracks. The bill was introduced with every prospect of its passage, when the mayor called together his city council, and quietly put the bill through the city council, by which the city was to pay  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. Then the railroad lawyers went directly to the legislature, called attention to this contract, and demanded that a law be passed so as to compel the city to live up to that agreement, which the legislature did.

The Galveston plan, as I view it, is one of commission. It is a perpetual body. (It is a potentially perfect political machine.)

There has been no change in the membership of the Galveston commission since it was organized in 1900 (except on the death of a member).

The extensive powers of the commissioners have enabled them to control all political factions and completely to crush the opposition. The commissioners' faction is in complete control and its leaders dictate nominations of commissioners, members of the legislature and congressmen.

The farmers of Galveston county call the Galveston commissioners and grade raising board "a gang of thieves."

The Galveston commissioners and city officials are not easily accessible to the citizens of the city, and give but a small portion of their time to the city's business.

None of the commissioners (except the mayor) has an office in the City Hall.

All of them have other extensive business interests and citizens seeking redress or assistance must run the gauntlet of the outside office and closed door of the private business office.

The city auditor has no office in the City Hall.

The city treasurer has no office in the City Hall.

The city attorney has no office in the City Hall.

The incumbents of these offices accepted them only on the condition that they might continue also in their other business and offices.

In Houston, which also has a commission form of government where the commissioners are required to stay in the City Hall



every day, business men do not hold these positions although the salaries are higher than the proposed salaries of the Des Moines commissioners. One commissioner was formerly a scavenger, another a blacksmith, justice of the peace and alderman, a third a railway auditor, a fourth, a drygoods merchant, and the mayor a retired capitalist.

The Galveston commissioners favor the corporation. The only franchise given to a corporation by the commission is the franchise obtained by the Galveston Street Railway Co., in May 1906. It was not referred to a vote of the people. (This franchise was given for a period of fifty years.) The city received no compensation for this franchise and collected no franchise taxes on it. The city receives no percentage of the gross or net receipts. The company charges a straight five cent fare and transfers are issued only from May to October. The company paves the space between the rails and one foot on each side. There are thirty-eight miles of tracks and the property is assessed at \$243,150.00 or \$6,398.00 per mile.

Des Moines has 76.95 miles and is assessed at \$792,000.00, or \$10,355.00 per mile (and only about 62 miles straight).

### *Comparative Statement*

	Des Moines	Indianapolis	Galveston
Square miles .....	54	28.8	6.5
Population (estimated) .....	75,000	200,000	30,000
Valuation .....	67,852,960	158,087,000	48,000,000
Rate of tax for municipal purpose.....	.79½ on \$100	.88 on \$100	
Tax for all purposes.....	\$2.00 on \$100	\$2.14 on \$100	\$2.13 on \$100
Number lights .....	2,100	1,683	222
Park acreage .....	650	1,320	16.7
Number of firemen.....	97	250	53
Number of policemen.....	62	253	28
Number of miles paving.....	110	203	18
Number of miles of streets..	460	About 300	73
Bonded debt .....	\$678,000	2,930,800	4,046,000
Saloons .....	100	740	73
City expense .....	\$641,116.00	\$1,772,758.00	\$577,210.00
Tax per capita.....	8.66	9.33	21.00
Total revenue .....	641,116.00	1,865,027.00	693,270.00
Debt per capita.....	9.04	14.55	122.60
Cost of street lighting.....	65,867.60	142,500.00	Municipal
Cost of street cleaning.....	23,000.00	169,000.00	23,000.00

The Galveston municipal government is not free from "graft." The prosecutor of city cases in the police court collects a

fee of \$10 for every criminal, drunk, or vagrant convicted, and \$5 from every one who pleads guilty.

The city attorney collects \$3,000.00 each year from the city as a fee for special counsel and the printing of abstracts (in addition to his salary of \$1,200.00). He has appointed his law partner as an assistant with a salary of \$900. They are allowed 5 per cent of all delinquent taxes collected, as an additional fee. A third assistant is paid a salary of \$600 per year.

Total of receipts and expenditures of the city of Des Moines for the year 1906:—

To pay expense of Police Dept., Fire Dept., official payroll, street cleaning, supplies, election, fuel, and repairing of all public buildings, and construction and equipment of all fire houses.....	\$301,036.00
Water rental .....	51,484.00
Lighting of the city.....	58,862.00
Building bridges and repairing.....	52,451.00
Cleaning, repairing all sewers of the city, and building intercepting sewers .....	31,457.00
Grading and opening streets and alleys.....	51,535.00
For payment of bonds and interest.....	43,111.00
For purchase of new cemetery.....	4,681.00
Care of cemeteries.....	4,681.00
Improvement fund for the payment of all public improvements where property will not stand assessment....	35,246.00
Total for municipal purposes.....	\$651,227.00
Judgment fund.....	16,703.00

While we are giving an outline of the regime of Galveston and Indianapolis we beg to call your attention to the fact that within five years Des Moines has built five new fire houses and a city library; bought parks, built bridges, reduced the bonded indebtedness over \$200,000.00 and with all this the tax levy is less than it was five years ago. Des Moines has done several things. It has built and equipped five fire houses, at a cost of \$75,000.00, new bridges at the cost of \$160,000.00, paid out \$30,000.00 on account of the flood, and \$75,000.00 on account of smallpox, and has built four miles of intercepting sewer. It has paid \$100,000.00 of a floating debt. Des Moines has paid over \$300,000.00 in the last five years for city parks and maintenance, and has paid \$195,000.00 for a city library. We have on hand bridges and fire equipment to accommodate a city of 300,000 people. Yet Des Moines has on hand \$240,955.00 of

which almost \$30,000.00 is available to be used in the reduction of the city's indebtedness.

We are convinced that neither the Galveston plan nor the Indianapolis plan will meet the wants and demands of the city of Des Moines.

Des Moines stands almost alone for low expenses, and we are one of the few cities in the United States where our assessed valuation is less than that employed today and the changes that we would recommend are few, and are as follows:

First, the Board of Public Works and the Police and Fire Commission should be appointed by the mayor without confirmation and hold office subject to his pleasure.

Second, we would recommend that the City Engineer be made a member, ex-officio, of the Board of Public Works.

Respectfully submitted,

W. N. Jordan,

Chairman Committee.

#### Plain Talk (Des Moines). January 19, 1907.

##### Municipal Reforms Needed.

Professor Herriott's mode of attack upon the Galveston or commissioner system presented various considerations that meet with general approval. He contended, first, that there is no disagreement as to the need of vigorous reforms in our city government. He said there was no serious discussion as to the causes of our trouble, nor does any one doubt that we need some business principles in city government. He disputed vigorously, however that the matter in issue was simply a matter of business.

A city is not as easy to manage as a grocery store or a bank. If the matter that bothers were simply a matter of business, we ought at once to put the city into commission, viz: enter into a contract with some superintendent of operations of a railway, whereby we secure a ten-year contract under which such contractor undertakes to manage our affairs without further bother. We could make money by so doing.

But we cannot sublet a municipality. It is an agency of government that we must deal with, an arm of the sovereign power of the government that exercises the power of life and death

over persons and property,—an agency that can dynamite buildings and declare martial law in times of peril in order to promote or protect the general welfare.

Professor Herriott then attacked the Galveston plan upon several different counts. First, because none of the precedents offered in justification of the radical change advocated, viz., making one body both a legislative and an executive organ—were not authoritative or binding. Second, because the commissioner system was hostile to business efficiency as measured by commercial and industrial standards. Third, because it is obnoxious to democracy, and republican or free institutions; and Fourth, it was expressly in conflict with the constitution of Iowa, in that it gave legislative duties (ordinance and budget making powers), to an executive board and executive functions to a law-making or legislative board.

The precedents urged on behalf of the commissioner system, he disposed of summarily, but we believe effectually. Galveston's city commission was the child of disaster; its success was the result of a terrible calamity that compelled the citizens to coerce their leading citizens into taking the leading offices. The present success and that of Dallas and Houston are due to the intoxication resulting from the furore of public interest in the plan signified by the magazine articles, etc. Dallas had experienced a frightful mismanagement and gross waste of funds, and became desperate, and in desperation adopted the Galveston model. But, death-bed repentances or spasms of reform, are seldom permanently efficacious.

Washington, D. C., is much relied upon by the advocates of the commissioner system, but Professor Herriott pointed out that not only did the people of our national capital have no right of self-government, but that they were subject to military control in effect, as a United States army officer must be one of the commissioners. There is no more self-government at Washington than in St. Petersburg. But here in Iowa, we believe in self-government and insist upon it as essential.

British councils, often cited, are not in point, because they range in members from twelve to sixty-four in number. They legislate for control and supervise English cities, but their mem-

bers do not undertake to manage directly the executive departments. Furthermore, we do not have the leisure class in America that are so much relied upon in England. Finally, we are not a part of England, and English customs today under the monarchical forms and pretences are not entirely agreeable to our ways of political life and thought.

**Plain Talk (Des Moines). February 2, 1907.**

Dominant Mayor Essential in Good City Government.

If specialization and the employment of experts are essential to success in modern business; and if accountability and responsibility are imperative in city government as well as in business; then a central dominating mind—a mayor with coercive powers of co-ordination and control—is a fundamental condition of an efficient city administration. Specialization in executive work both implies and demands a head with power of control in the carrying out of the law and the accomplishment of the wishes of the citizens as expressed through ordinances.

Experts and specialists, who are in truth trained men, know but little outside their own departments or fields of work. Moreover, they care little for anything else than their specialty. More important still, they exalt and magnify the importance of their particular office and seek always (and very naturally, too) to extend their work by securing more funds and power therefor. If we let specialists alone and follow their lead each and all will expand and spread beyond all bounds. They would soon bankrupt the treasuries of Croesus. What is worse, the expansion of departments in all directions means immediate clash, confusion, one with another. Offices and departments will overlap and interlock. This produces the confusion worse confounded that now befogs the public mind and enables weak or corrupt city officials to manipulate government for private gain.

But we need and must employ expert public servants. If so, we must have one over them in full charge who will compel them to work in harmony, who will coerce them into co-operation and economy, who will make the entire civil service of a city work to the one common objective, namely, efficient government

at the least cost. A powerful mayor is no less essential in controlling and directing the various organs of the body.

Now the function of the mayor or central directing mind can not, for reasons set forth by Professor F. I. Herriott of Drake University and partially outlined by us last week, can not be divided or "parceled out" as is proposed in the Galveston system of city government. A city administration is not and can not be accountable if five men are in charge of executive work. Our old proverbs "Too many cooks spoil the broth" and "What's everybody's business is nobody's business" are as true as Holy Writ in city government. Accountability implies responsibility; and responsibility means direct, immediate personal liability of the person or official charged with the performance of a duty or task. If the officer or servant fails to satisfy—if he blunders or ignores, perverts or stumbles in his work, we discharge him. But if some one or some body of commissioners are always expected to interfere and take over his responsibility, then we can not hold him accountable, in so far as his authority and power to exercise his full judgment at discretion is undermined.

It is pure ignorance or sentimentalism when advocates of the Galveston commission compare it to the board of directors of banks and business corporations. The commission as advocated, as we have pointed out, not only legislates—passes ordinances, authorizes the budget and supervises the conduct and reports of department chiefs, but it is also charged with the work of "managing" the city's affairs. Herein, Professor Herriott contends, lie both the dangers and the iniquities of the proposed plan. It not only violates good business organization, but it strikes squarely in the face of all our principles and traditions of democracy and republican or representative institutions.

Boards of directors do not manage banks. They determine the policy and supervise the president and cashier and their administration, but they do not actually or formally undertake the particular task of conducting a bank. Moreover, when they do intrude into the domain of the cashier and president further than giving advice upon loans and auditing annual accounts or quarterly statements—they are almost certain to make a muddle and a mess of things that no competent cashier or president will

tolerate. Stockholders and directors alike look to the cashier to "make things go" and for their dividends. It is Mr. Carnegie and Mr. James J. Hill, Mr. Marshall Field, in iron mills, railroads and stores that make profits and dividends. It is Messrs. Cassidy and Pearsall, McKinney and Miller in our city who direct, control and manage our city banks successfully and make dividends, and not their directory boards. The latter are necessary as a legislative council, but they should not undertake managerial work.

Precisely the same sort of centralized administration that prevails in all successful business corporations must be reproduced in our city government. Just how to secure the mayor, Professor Herriott concedes, is a debatable question. In business corporations presidents and cashiers are usually elected by boards of directors and there is no serious theoretical objection to this mode of procedure except that city government is not so easily or so quickly managed as a private corporation. Our practice and tradition is almost wholly opposed and there is seldom benefit in running counter to our political customs. We probably will gain more—the people will feel more contented with the system if the mayor is elected at a general election.

But the mayor and the executive department of city government represent merely one-half of the municipal problems before us at this time and the serious fallacy in recent discussion has been the utter failure of the advocates of the Galveston system to realize that a council that will exercise the legislative function is city government. There is no mayor and there is no commission of three or five men that is safe enough or sane enough or broad enough to legislate for the people of Des Moines and then to have the privilege and the power to carry out their own ideas subject to all the pressure of personal prejudice and pecuniary temptation. To give such enormous power to one body is obnoxious to all that is distinctly American in principle and in practice.



**Plain Talk (Des Moines). February 16, 1907.****Commission System and Non-Partizan Government.**

In his address before the Prairie Club last January, in which he contended that the Galveston commission system of city government was essentially bad in plan and would work viciously in practice, Professor F. I. Herriott of Drake University declared that an alderman is not redeemed and sanctified by calling him a commissioner. Further, he contended that we do not and cannot change human nature, we cannot obliterate greed and abolish passion and prejudice by giving officers more power and entrenching their powers. Moreover, he asserted that the matter in issue before the people of Des Moines is not a choice between government and bad government. We all concede that our present system is sadly deficient, that its evils are manifest and admitted by all intelligent citizens, and there is a general and vigorous demand from all parties that rigorous reforms be instituted. The real question is the method by which we shall undertake to right matters. It is simply whether we shall jump from the frying pan into the fire. Neither place is comfortable, but the fire is certainly not desirable or preferable. Let us see if we can attain the ideal under the new reform we are so loudly urged to adopt.

The advocates of the commission system seem to think that the new scheme will secure us "non-partizan" city government. It may be conceded that now and then we may act upon city affairs and elect aldermen solely upon business considerations appertaining to the city's welfare. We may do so regardless of free silver or the gold standard, regardless of Rooseveltism or imperialism, regardless of standpatism or commissionism, regardless of Cummins and anti-Cummins, regardless of Hull or Prouty. Now and then we may exclude such considerations from public debate and local action at the polls on the city's government and budget. But are we likely to do so? Can we rationally expect citizens to do so with conditions as they are and must be?

Our manufacturer merchants are keenly interested in state and national policies, in the tariff, in railroad rates, in meat inspection. The attitude of our legislators in state and national assemblies is a matter of vital concern to them. They are the

same men whether considering a tariff schedule, or the government of a railroad, or debating municipal franchises. Man is not a modern sea-going liner with separate water tight compartments with bulk heads separating each section. His political acts, like his interests, must of necessity run together and interplay, one affecting and deterring the other.

The man ambitious to secure legislation or public honors in state or nation must appeal to the same men who run the city. The men who seek to control city affairs, to determine its policy, or secure its honors must appeal to the same men who manage and conduct the agencies that prevail in state and national affairs.

Will public service corporations that manage our city railways, our telephones and telegraphs, our water system, our heating and lighting plants cease to covet gain, cease to look with designing eyes on the city council, cease to scrutinize the ordinances and care not about the character of the men who will enforce the regulations affecting the conduct and dividends? Will the men interested in the sale of wine and beer and the people of their saloons, will the keeper of dives and gambling dens become converted and join the church and cease to trouble our souls and harass not the police or surround them?

Some of the expectations of our city reformers regarding non-partizan government make one think that many of our hard-headed business men are suffering from softening of the brain or confusion of their minds.

The evils we complain of can be reduced and curbed, but not by the Galveston system.

# FACTS CONCERNING COMMISSION PLAN

The following data includes investigations up to August 1st, 1909. With few exceptions, the information has been secured directly from the various Secretaries of State. In cases where no responses have been received, information, where the authenticity is unquestioned, has been used.

## *States Providing for Commission Plan*

California	New Mexico (Terr.)
Colorado	North Dakota
Idaho	Oklahoma
Iowa	Oregon
Kansas	South Dakota
Massachusetts	Tennessee
Michigan	Texas
Minnesota	Washington
Mississippi	Wisconsin

## *Cities That Have Adopted the Commission Plan of Government*

Ardmore, Okla.	Dallas, Tex.
Austin, Tex.	Denison, Tex.
Berkeley, Calif.	Des Moines, Ia.
Bismarck, North Dakota.	El Paso, Tex.
Boise, Idaho.	Fort Worth, Tex.
Cedar Rapids, Ia.	Galveston, Tex.
Chelsea, Mass.	Gloucester, Mass.
Colorado Springs, Colo.	Greenville, Tex.
Corpus Christi, Tex.	Haverhill, Mass.

Houston, Tex.	Memphis, Tenn.
Hutchinson, Kans.	Minot, North Dakota.
Independence, Kans.	Palestine, Tex.
Kansas City, Kans.	Rosewell, New Mex. (Terr.)
Keokuk, Io.	San Diego, Calif.
Leavenworth, Kans.	Sioux Falls, South Dakota.
Lewiston, Idaho.	Tulsa, Okla.
Mandan, North Dakota.	Waco, Tex.
Marshall, Tex.	Wichita, Kans.

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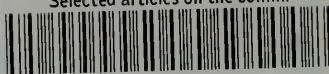








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